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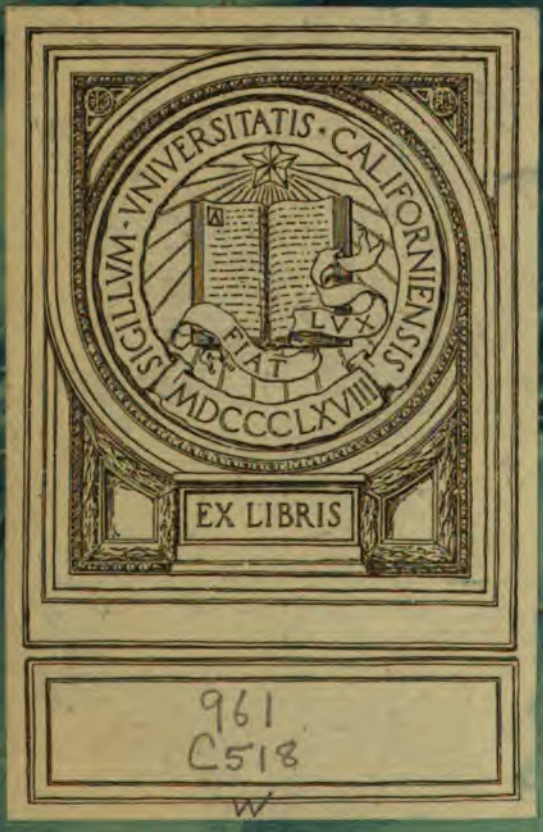
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THE WAY OF THE NORTH

The Way of the North

A Romance of the Days of Baranof

By

WARREN CHENEY

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New York
Doubleday, Page & Company
1905

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To

Those Who Believed

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LIST OF CHARACTERS

ALEXANDER ANDREIEVITCH BARANOF, Commander of the Alaskan Posts

FEDOR KIRILOVITCH DELAROF, a doctor

ALEXEI YEGOROVITCH SOOKIN, Lieutenant under Baranof

JOASSAF PETROVITCH, a priest of the Russian Church

ANNA MARYA GARIN (ANNA GREGOROVNA), betrothed to Lieutenant Sookin

MARFA EKATERINA (MARFA ALEXANDROVNA), daughter of Baranof

GREGOR IVANOVITCH GARIN, father of Anna

PAUL ALEXANDROVITCH, Baranof's son

MARYA ANDREIEVNA, Marfa's aunt

PETER NICOLAIEVITCH, an under-officer

POTAP BURIKOF, and LIZA, his wife, Russian immigrants

DMETRI LEROKEN, ARSENI KUZNETZOF, VASILI SHAPKIN, IVAN ZAVIALOF, soldier-hunters

SHAKMUT, NIKTA, PARKA, Alaskan natives

THE WAY OF THE NORTH

THE WAY OF THE NORTH

CHAPTER I

THE cabin floor being now more level, I walked up and down along the tables to stretch my legs and stir somewhat to life the sluggish current of my blood. There are few things more bitter than the forced inaction of waiting below hatches while the ship wears out a storm. Under their brightest guise these northern waters have much about them to terrify the heart. There is something sombre, wild, and menacing in their calmness, and always a so inhuman silence in the air that the very lack weighs on the spirit like a sense of evil felt. One seems so utterly alone—the only living thing in all this treacherous expanse.

So, even while the skies were fair, it was with a distinct feeling of relief that I had welcomed the gathering clouds and the freshening of the wind that brought the storm upon us. Life has no actual experience of danger that is for a moment comparable to the heart-sickness of its anticipation, and the singing of the ropes, the sharp orders of the officers in charge, the bustle of orderly haste in taking in the canvas, steadied my soul and stirred a curious sense of lightness in my heart.

"The world moves," I said, as I stood by the rail and watched the whip of the spume from the crests of the racing waves and the increasing slant of the ship as she drove her nose down into the ever-deepening hollows.

That night the sun set far astern without its usual pomp of colour, letting down its round disc naked into the sea. There was no more warmth in its light than there was in the sallow background of cloud that hung behind it and seemed momentarily lifted higher above our heads. The last thing I saw as I turned to go below was the wind-blown figure of the man at the helm silhouetted against the western whiteness and bent like a distressed cypress as he held us to our course. Had I been older or more seasoned, I should have seen in these things the sinister presentiment of the trouble that was to come. But for the moment there only came to me the feeling that there were things doing in earth and air and sky, and my heart warmed to them in sympathy, through sheer impatience of the sluggish life.

But death itself is not more certain than that a man will change his mind. I had thought myself well pleased with the promise of the storm, and, in retiring, endured with even humour the roll and tossing of the berth. But with the night my inclination turned, and I yearned as strongly for the quiet of the sunshine and the level sea, as before I had cried out at fate for setting them around me.

For who could have foreseen the mist that set in with the dawn—a mist so thick and smothery that it choked and clung like a wet cloth drawn? I could scarce see my hand at arm's length before me; the sailors at their posts faded into mere shadowy ghosts; while the voice of the lookout at the bow quavered back to us so thin and muffled that it was like a call from another world. Yet the fog offered small hindrance to the roaring wind; and from the top it leaked so like a sieve that the rain came through in mighty sheets and gusts.

There is much to disquiet in the thought of thus driving madly and blindly through the world; and the more so when to the irk of mind is added the natural disquietude of body that comes with confinement under decks. I have not the preacher's fear of death and have faced it cheerfully and with a steady front. But I have ever prayed that at the last it would come to me fairly, in the open, where I could meet it with head up and arms free to guard. These four shifting walls have weighed on my spirits like a coffin closed. I have never had a stomach for being smothered like a rat drowned in a trap. Two days of it would take the fettle out of any man, and nearly twice that time I have been prisoned here.

And the vexation works the stronger in me that by chance I have had my fall with it alone. The pope, bold-faced enough when skies were clear, paled like a girl when the wind shook up our coffin box and let the courage so ooze out of him that at last he sat him down on the floor the better to hold his swimming head. Motion brings to me no dizzy qualms, and I strove patiently both with threats and jeers to rebuff his malady and lift him from dejection. But with the shamelessness toward correction which marks the sick at sea, he hankened to me with but lack-lustre eyes and languid smile, and ended by selfishly leaving me alone while he carried his green face incontinently away to the shelter of his own room; since when I have had no word of his condition.

That there has been sharp danger in our situation I am as well convinced as if I had been told. It has spoken in the groaning of the ship's timbers as they bent and stretched beneath the shock of the waves; it has

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lurked in the stagger of the helpless hull when the water poured over her decks and she wallowed in the bubbly smother like some desperate drowning thing; it has come to me with each sickening drop down the steep hollows of the waves, and I have felt it go up before me as the ship steadied for the climb of their dizzy rise.

Yet such premonitions are reputed solely of the body and look not to the reason for their confirmation. It was not these but other happenings which stayed in my mind and fixed this thought of peril on it with a lasting sense of shock. The first of these occurrings is that the captain himself has lost heart through his fear and has given the whole ship over to destruction.

This is a Thursday, as I have been able to mark the lagging days. It should be yesterday, therefore—which was Wednesday—and near to noon, that he burst into the cabin, along with a great gust of wind and rain, and stood against the table to catch his breath, while they clapped to the door and fastened it speedily behind him. The cool air was like wine in that barrel of a place, but it was not so cold as the comfort I gathered from his face.

If ever a man was in mortal terror, it was that man as he stood. His mouth was blue and drawn and he shivered steadily in his wet clothes. His eyes were fixed on that which had no being outside of his mind, and though I spoke to him, he answered not, and I had faith to believe I did not come at all within his ken. He stood for a full minute balancing himself and steadying his nerves, and then, with the same unseeing look ahead, groped his way blindly along the table until he gained his private room. I saw the door close and heard the key click behind him, and since then, like the pope, he

has made no conscious sign. But, in the quieter moments of the storm, I have fancied I have caught from him within the alternate gurgle of his bottle and the murmur of his prayers.

The other occurrence which has given colour to my squeamish thought is that, since the first closing of the hatches, there has been no attempt by any one to furnish us with food. Yet I had not suffered with hunger, for there are still on the table the remains of the last full meal the steward placed there, and while I have eaten as the need spoke in me, my appetite has been at no time over sharp. But there must have been large difficulty in entrance—which is danger in itself—or else, as is more probable, the profound conviction on the part of the cook that we were so far doomed that it made no difference whether we went to death hungry or full, that we have been left so long and continuously unserved.

As I look back on it, I do not think that I have been at any time particularly afraid. In truth, I cannot remember that through it all I have had much time to think. The writers are agreed that mortal danger brings up unasked to a man's eye the sudden picture of his past deeds and life. But it was not so with me. I have cursed some as the mood struck me, and have thought of places where I would better like to be. But when I was not asleep, I was so greatly taken up with holding to my place and guessing in what direction next this floating box would roll, that I have had small time for mental inquiry.

To this one weakness, however—if it be a weakness—I will honestly confess. At the peril of my bones, I have kept the light burning before the holy pictures on

the forward partition wall. Not that I felt the need of cozening God and drawing from Him special favour in this my time of fear. If there be a God, my conceit is that, as with men, His favour goes to the petitioner that shows the stoutest heart. To him that hath, is given; not to those weaklings whose constant and only refuge is to beg.

So it was rather that, lacking human sympathy, I found a friendly sense of companionship in the performance of the service. And then, too, the difficulty of its doing piqued my stubborn sense of pride. The lamp fat is thick and sluggish, but in the stress of motion the full cup spilled and drowned the wick so many times that I was in despair. Once, also, I slipped in the drip of oil upon the floor and, catching wildly, well-nigh brought the whole thing down about my head. But finally I bethought me of the device of leaving the lamp unfilled, the plate and wick resting on but a thin scum of grease against the bottom. This proved a proper means of keeping it alight, but brought me continuous labour in the introduction of new oil beneath the plate to keep it fed.

It was natural, therefore, that with the sinking of the storm I should promptly turn to the restoring of the feed of the lamp to its ordinary and wonted supply. The oil jar was ready to my hand, though I saw ruefully enough that there was already grease enough on my clothes and feet to supply a reasonable season of the burning. I was so taken up with my thoughts and with the task of renovation that I failed to see that the pope came out of his room, and did not hear him till he spoke to me.

"While the priest sleeps, the sinner tends the altar,"

he said with a smile. "It was a fine thing, Fedor, but I did not expect it of you. Were you, then, so very much afraid?" It vexed me for a moment that he should gird at me, and I answered him across my shoulder without turning.

"It is my custom," I said somewhat grimly, "to take no chances where fortune gives me the power to load the dice. If the thing is true, I want Him with me; if it is not, there is no harm done." My cynicism sobered him, and he made an involuntary motion of deprecation with his hands.

"It is true," he said impulsively, "and I was wrong in speaking as I did. I meant simply that it is the strong faith that prevails with Him, and not the mere work of the hand." I turned and pointed to the closed door at the stern.

"Faith be it, then," I answered, "and yonder is your company, not here." His eye followed the gesture and then came back to me in puzzled questioning.

"The captain?" he queried hesitatingly.

"Ay, the captain. Since yester noon he has wholly eschewed works, and in retirement there has given himself entirely up to prayer." He still stood looking from the door to me in startled inquiry.

"But the direction of the ship?" he stammered.

"So full of faith is he," I answered mockingly, "that he has left it wholly in the hand of God!"

"The coward!" he burst out indignantly; and then I laughed. I love the pope and would not wrongly cross him, but it is not often I have the chance to checkmate him so completely.

"Joassaf," I said wickedly, "with which of us two sinners will you place your hope of salvation from this

storm—with the captain and his faith, or with me who has served God wholly with his hands?" I might have known I could not corner him. He shrugged his shoulders and smiled as one would set aside the question of a child.

"God is good," he said simply, "and perhaps in spite of both of you we may yet see quiet days." Then with a return to his usual manner: "There are other things now that draw me much more strongly than theology. Have you anything here to eat?" His eyes were sharp and eager and roamed with hungry interest over the confusion of the dishevelled board. I thought of his long fast, and my heart softened toward him.

"There was a fish pasty that was not so bad," I said, "if we can find it. Ah, there it is on the floor by the table. And when I find a cup I think you can count on getting a portion of cold tea." His face brightened at the prospect.

"The pasty will do well," he said, lifting it to the table as if it were some precious thing. "But I am so old a man that cold tea sits unkindly on my stomach. Let us have the steward bring us a portion that is fresh."

"Steward!" I exclaimed, "I have not seen the steward for three days. And as for going out, the hatches are still battened." The priest sighed and sat him down in silent discontent.

"I will try the pasty," he said with dignity, as if in some way I was responsible for his discomfort; "and I will drink the tea, though I know it will make a schism in my stomach."

But he forgot his annoyance in the pleasure of the meal and ate steadily in silence. I served him faith-

fully, and as he sucked his sugar lump and sipped the bitter tea I fell to wondering what could have so changed his life and sent him as a missionary out to this savage land. I had known him as the pope of my native village when I was a boy. It was he who held me up for baptism, and I had received my first communion at his hand. He had been loved by my father before me, and his slender figure in its close-buttoned surtout was a familiar object in our daily life. I had known him always as a man upright and severe in conduct, who seldom drank except at weddings, was not given to haggling over his funerals, and who was singularly free from the other ordinary vices of the clergy. He was ever a kindly man and loved by his flock as if they had been his blood relations all. Not a child was born but he was first after its mother to look into its eyes; and his sorrowful face was the last thing that most of them took in as they shut those eyes for the last time on this world. He had seemed so much a part of the place that it was a shock at first to find him on the ship and know him wandering so wide of home. Considering these things in my mind, the impulse came to me as it had often done before to ask him of the change.

"Joassaf Petrovitch," I said, "why have you left Kargopol and comfort to bury your bones in this God-forsaken land?" He had finished with his meal and, slid down in his chair in an attitude of repose, was contentedly taking snuff. For the moment he did not answer; but when he did speak, it was with pensive impersonality, as if he had forgotten me entirely and was talking to himself.

"Why, yes," he said, "I suppose that is so. I shall never go back to Russia. I had not thought of it before."

"But why did you come at all," I persisted. He wakened from his reverie and straightened himself in his chair. Then with his quiet smile he answered my question with another.

"Fedor," he said, "why did you leave Okhotsk?" The inquiry was unepxected and I felt the blood surge in my cheeks.

"You have no right to ask me that!" I said indignantly.

"But did you come of your own free will?"

"You know the story," I said hotly. "I did not mean to kill the man. He was a Chuckchi. I beat him to make him keep his place. He came at me with a knife, and it was his life or mine."

"But the governor did not think so," he persisted, "and so you came." I could have struck him where he sat for very bitterness of shame; but when it came to the fact there was no denying it.

"Yes," I said sullenly, "if you will have it, that is the truth." This time his smile had in it a touch of gentle deprecation. He leaned forward and laid his hand on mine.

"I was not judging you, Fedor," he said with sympathetic pressure. "But now you may understand that I, too, came not altogether of my own free will." My annoyance passed in astonishment at his answer.

"I do not believe it," I said impetuously. "You never did a wicked or lawless thing in all your life." He was pleased with the compliment and my enthusiasm, and his hand took firmer grip of mine.

"But the pressure was there just the same," he continued earnestly, "though it differed in its kind. The call came to me to go, and I had no choice but to

obey. I loathe the Indians, I loathe the hardships of the life, I have left behind me everything that I love, but—God willed it, and I came."

My heart cried out at the injustice of the matter, for I have small sympathy with such delusions as that which held him in its grip. But his sincerity checked the bitter word that waited on my lips, and I passed at once to a conclusion.

"Well," I said impatiently, "I trust if you ever see Him that sent you, He will give you a valid reason for the sacrifice!" The old man rose to his feet and stood before me. His face was lit with a sort of ecstasy of wistfulness, and he was so swallowed up in his dream of faith that for the moment he forgot entirely where he was. I at least dropped outside of his consciousness, though he still held my hand clasped tight in both of his.

"If I see Him!" he repeated softly. "Fedor, I shall see Him and I shall know! If I did not believe it I would not care to live a day. Not a day——" he repeated softly, and in his excitement his eyes grew large and his breath came in irregular little sobs. He was a picturesque figure as he stood there in his gray gown and dishevelled hair, with the conviction of his consecration so firmly on him. I felt a dislike for breaking in upon his mood, and so was silent; but when I could, I gently drew away my hand. He remained for some minutes possessed by his vision and talking softly and unintelligibly to himself. The interruption of natural circumstances that brought him back came not from me, but from the outside world.

For, while we stood, there came to us the rattle and scrape of the hatches as they were removed and the

welcome sound of human noise above. The door opened and the steward came hurriedly down the stairs. It was on the point of my tongue to berate him soundly for his long defection, and truly he deserved the strong bestowal of my wrath; but he waited not for me to speak up and begin.

"The captain!" he said breathlessly as he reached the cabin floor. I pointed to the bolted door. He went swiftly across to it, tapped respectfully and called. There was no answer and he called again. Then, as no response came to his repeated knockings, he began to shout, and hammer on the panels with both hands. I watched him from under my eyebrows with a growing sense of amusement.

"Tell him you are the Angel Gabriel, man," I called sardonically; "that he is dead, and that you have come to fetch him. That is what he is waiting for, and I doubt if anything short of it will bring him out." He ceased his efforts and came back to where we stood.

"It is very bad," he said anxiously. "They are fighting forward and it may be murder if he does not come."

"Who are fighting?" I asked.

"It is the settlers. They have been four days fastened down below decks and are more than ugly. Gregor Ivanovitch Garin has been hurt and I fear is like to die. He was the only doctor, and there is no one else who knows."

"He should have attendance," I said at once. "I have some knowledge of healing and have practised it at need, and if there is no other to go——" The steward turned to me immediately.

"It can do no harm," he said with evident relief.

"The man will die anyway if he gets no help." I motioned to him to go, and he led the way up outside to the air. The pope had not spoken in the interval, but when we went out he followed close behind. I have seen pictures of the last great resurrection and noted the dead men rising from their graves; and when we reached the deck of the ship and filled our lungs with the pure air of heaven, I knew exactly what was the first joy of those dead saints as they came up to paradise.

CHAPTER II

THE rain had stopped and so, too, the wind. The ship lay with sails flapping in a sea that still rolled heavily. But like a blanket the gray fog lay over everything and so changed and shrouded the familiar things about us that our whole world kept a semblance weird and strange. We picked our way cautiously over a tangle of ropes and other sea toggery on the decks and came to the forward hatch. I swung myself after the steward down the steep companion ladder and reached the floor of the hold below. As I landed, the pope's lean legs were just above me, coming down.

For the moment the eye grasped no detail in the dull and smoky light. The low room was simply one great expanse of changing shadow. But as we gathered power of concentration, groups of figures started out of the darkness, coming unexpectedly one after another like the trick settings in the scenes of a fairy play. Like pieces of a heathen puzzle they changed and joined and ran together, till at length I got a comprehensive picture of the whole.

There were eighty of the poor creatures—a third, perhaps, being women and children—shut in that dreadful place; but as between man and woman there was no difference that I could see in the quality of their trouble and distress. I know not by what dream of betterment Baranof had persuaded them to come on this bitter journey, though there is no doubt his need

of them at Sitka was great. Yet, as I saw them stretched in absolute abandon on the filth of the floor or propped in stolid listlessness against the stalls and stanchions, I felt that Baranof himself would in seeing them have felt a twinge at heart that through him they had come to such abject and utter misery.

Perhaps the thing that caught my attention most strongly was the unusual silence of the place. From the time we entered, no one spoke a word. Many of the men sat stolidly and did not even follow us with their eyes. But many others gazed at us with sullen looks and followed us with their glances as we moved, as if in fascination. There was something strange in the quality of their regard, and I was increasingly conscious that there was in it not only a natural surprise, but also something of startled inquiry and suspicion. But I wasted small time on the analysis and turned me to the steward.

"Where is your sick man?" I said impatiently, my voice echoing sharply in the silence.

"Yonder, sir," he answered, pointing toward the bow. We made our way in that direction, avoiding as far as possible to tread on the poor creatures under foot, for they took no heed to get out of the way and scarcely resented even that we stepped upon them.

At the extreme end was a circle of men standing. They fell away at our approach, and beyond them on the floor, against the wall, I discovered the patient we had come to see. He lay with his head entirely in the shadow of the corner, and his body limply doubled up against the wall. The relaxation was so complete that I thought him already dead. Respect or fear had kept the crowd a decent distance from him and he seemed to be alone.

I passed quietly across the intervening space and bent beside him, feeling for his heart. But, almost as I touched him, there was a sudden movement in the shadow by the head, a flutter as of garments stirred, and something like a small whirlwind swept out be-between me and the sick man, throwing aside my hands and overturning me suddenly on the floor.

My temper is not saintly at the best, and I got to my feet with my teeth set and anger in my heart. I could think of no explanation but that it was a jest these people had thus put upon me; and I turned fiercely to the circle of onlookers as I got upon my legs and listened for the laugh I felt would surely come.

But to my astonishment there was no answering cackle of appreciation and on no face did I descry the expected grin of pleasure or approval. Instead, a curious murmur, more like the inarticulate snarl of a pack of beasts than anything human, ran round the circle of close-pressed figures, and their faces showed fierce-eyed and serious in the twilight of the place. Evidently there was no humour for them in the mishap that had befallen me. Yet either toward me or toward something else, their manner was surely one of bitter disapproval, and that, too, a dislike that had much both of suspicion and menace in it. It was so plain that my overthrow had not come from them that I turned again toward the sick man for an explanation, and, so doing, came face to face with the cause of my discomfiture.

In the shadow at the man's head, where I had not noticed her before, there was a young girl crouching. It was too dark to see her face, but from her attitude I knew she was waiting for me, bent for another spring.

I hesitated as I came forward and she rose to meet me, stepping again between me and the man. She was a slender creature, hardly yet of woman's height. Her dress was disordered and on one shoulder, through a long rent, the white skin showed plainly. Her hair hung loosely about her face, and I could see her body rise and fall with the intensity of her breathing.

She was a pathetic little figure as she faced me in the dimness. She was evidently very much afraid and, as she watched me, her eyes had the brightness and shifty intensity of a hunted animal's. One hand was held behind her, and with the other in self-conscious effort at concealment she again and again lifted up the torn flap of her dress, which as continually slipped away. If I had stopped to think, I should have been more kindly in my speech, but I was still shaken by the fall, and the words came hotly.

"Stand aside, you fool!" I said sharply. "What is the matter?" It seemed at first as if she would not answer, for she faced me dumbly, though without moving, and with her hunted eyes fixed steadily on my face. But it was excitement rather than stubbornness that bound her speech, for presently her mouth began to quiver and I could hear the frightened intake of her breath. Her lips moved drily as she tried to speak, and when the words came they were so low they scarcely carried out to where I stood.

"Can you not wait and let him die in peace?" she said fiercely. She was so distraught that it seemed but wise to humour her delusion.

"Of a certainty," I said, "he is not at peace now. It may be if I see him he will not die at all." She heard me though she did not appear to listen, and for

the moment her face was a shade less tragic in its fear.

"Who are you?" she said more audibly.

"I am a physician," I answered, "and was sent for to assist this man." She glanced up at me with new suspicion, and her face went back to its old expression of despair.

"Why do you lie to me?" she said brokenly. "My father was the only doctor on the ship." My temper rose again, and for the moment I lost my head.

"This is nonsense!" I said impatiently, and took a step forward. Then, as suddenly, I stopped. For, while for a moment she shrank visibly at the advance, as instantly she recovered herself again and waited defiantly for me to come. Her hand came out slowly from behind her back, and as she raised it I saw she had in it a knife.

"You shall not kill him!" she cried hoarsely, and her voice was scarce above a whisper. "You shall not!" There was a silence between us for the moment, and through it I heard again the inarticulate snarl of baffled purpose from the ring of men behind me. I cursed myself for being so unreasonable.

"Who wants to hurt him!" I burst out roughly. "We are not enemies but friends." The girl's manner softened toward me again, and her trembling came back and she shook as if she had an ague. She looked from me to the gaping crowd behind me.

"Ask them!"she said with a bitter laugh. I turned upon them sharply.

"Who of you," I demanded, "has been harrying this woman to her fear?" There was no answer. I had addressed no particular one, and they simply

gathered more closely together and spoke in sullen whispers among themselves. I looked them over with minuter care. The most of them had come direct from Russia, and with them a stranger's word would make but small appeal. But at the left I saw a man whom I had seen before. He was a joiner of wood and at Okhotsk had been much concerned about the shipping.

"Dmetri Leroken," I said imperiously, at the same time beckoning to him with my hand, "stand out, man, and tell me what has happened to these people and why you hold them here?" The man did not relish the distinction thus thrust upon him and would have shrunk back farther out of sight. His comrades, however, were wholly glad to yield to him the privilege and encouraged him, all unwilling, and pushed him out. He was a sturdy rascal, with no garment but a gray svitka that was already full of holes. He stood there, first looking down at the floor and then shiftily up at me, and did not say a word.

"Out with it!" I cried impatiently. "What has this man done?"

"He is a heretic," he said at last sullenly, "a Romanist, and an enemy of God's Church." Before I could speak, like an antiphonal chorus in a play I heard the girl's clear voice behind me.

"It is not true!" she said indignantly. "He was a good man and has the true cross hanging now about his neck." The man shrugged his shoulders.

"It may be so," he said simply, "but he was different. And then," he added, as if the fact of the blemish were a damning proof, "there is a black mole on his left cheek."

I have small patience with doings that draw their

vital sanction out of superstition. There is enough of real trouble that binds us in this life without increasing it by the needless fear of what we do not understand.

"You fool," I said coldly, "and what business is it of yours if he is every thing you say? Did you expect to make a better man of him because you broke his head?" The circle behind Leroken was growing uneasy, and he himself stood picking nervously at the holes of his svitka and shifting his weight upon his feet.

"He fell and hurt himself," he said slowly. His head was sunk down sheepishly on his breast and he did not raise his eyes. Again, as an echo to his accusation, I heard behind me the girl's indignant voice.

"They would have thrown him overboard!" she cried. "He fell—yes, but it was because he was struck and thrown!" Her words stirred up again to life all the prejudice and superstitious fear that Leroken had been struggling against and keeping down. He straightened himself to his full height and threw out his hands impetuously before him.

"Then why did he make the storm?" he demanded savagely. "Shall we all drown because there is a heretic aboard? It was his life or ours!" A growing murmur of assent went round the excited group. They stirred restlessly in their places and I could see that the time for parley had slipped quite away. Their leaders while we spoke had been passing from one to the other behind the line, and it was plain they had determined what to do. Two men came out upon the right and two upon the left and moved silently forward to the wall. Four more stepped out from the centre bight and arranged themselves in front of me, side by side.

They were brawny fellows all, and it was no pleasant sight to see them as they stood there ready for the rush.

At the first move, I had fallen back till my feet were against the old man's body. There could be but one outcome to the fight, I knew, but my blood was up and I should have hated myself for any thing that would have been desertion of his cause. As we stood there waiting, there was a twitch at my elbow and I felt rather than saw, for I did not dare to take my eyes from the murderous crew before me, that the girl put something into my hand.

"It is the knife," she whispered pantingly, but when I dared to look, she was back in the corner by the head. I felt a thrill of exultation at the contact, both at her trust in giving me the weapon and that, now, in the fray, I could be more sure of rendering good account.

"Stand back!" I said as I raised the weapon where it could be seen. "He who comes will have to take the measure both of me and this; and, mark you, if one of us is killed, there will be hanging when Baranof gets his fingers on you in America!"

The bravado held them for a moment and that moment was our salvation. For while we stood, and before the signal came, there was a stir at the centre of the group, the rioters stood aside and through the opening came Joassaf Petrovich in the full dignity of his clerical robes. In his right hand was the brush, and in his left was balanced a steadily slopping bowl of holy water. I had missed him early in the fray, and now surmised that at the first hint of heresy he had taken fire and had gone to array himself in his proper ecclesiastical armour. He paused

between us and the crowd and, turning, lifted up his hand.

"Children," he said, in his soft, even voice, "can you not trust God, that, unadvised, you take it on yourselves to act thus harshly in His name? Even if this man were God's enemy, how would it please Him, or make Him turn to you, that you add his murder to your sins? It was the devil and not God that put it in your hearts. Do you want the proof?" he asked, his voice rising till it filled the whole room like a bell. "Go and look for it outside. The storm is over. Do you hear? If this man's malice brought the evil down, God has punished him and we are still safely in His care. Why do you stay in this place when outside there is life and hope and air? As for the devils that remain, leave them, as many of you have done before, to me."

He ceased speaking and, turning, began walking up and down across the room, sprinkling holy water from his brush and chanting the service for the casting out of evil spirits, as I had seen him do many times before at home. The men gave way before him and he pushed them quietly back. But they waited reverently with outstretched finger-tips to take the drop from his proffered brush, and each time one did so he stopped his service with magnificent forgetfulness of the murder in their hearts, and blessed them one and all.

Thus left to myself I turned in belated succour to the injured man, and this time no one said me nay. The girl had sunk on her knees in the corner and sat watching me with a stony face. The stress of conflict she had undergone had sapped completely the resources of

her strength. She leaned in utter weariness against the wall and gave herself up wholly to her grief. Her hands lay limply in her lap, and even the torn flap of her dress hung shamelessly down without her notice.

I turned the man on his back and straightened out his limbs. There were bruises on his body and the fingers of one hand were broken. He was still alive, but had been long unconscious. There was an ugly wound at the back of his head, and around it I could feel that the bone was bent and crushed. The girl followed me through every thing with her appealing eyes. When I had done, she turned them fixedly on my face in wistful inquiry. I understood what she wanted and did not wait for her to speak.

"It is too late," I said gently. "It is only a question of time when he will die." For a moment she did not move, except that her eyes went away from me—and everything—and she sat gazing unseeingly at the wall. Then the tears began to run quietly down her cheeks, and as the relief of them worked their spell in her, she let herself slip down to the floor and lay in a pitiful heap with her arms about her father's shoulders and her face hid in his neck.

The pope had finished with his devil-driving and came back to where I stood. He held out his brush to me in invitation, but my thought was not yet keyed to heavenly things and my hand stayed unresponsive at my side. He was not to be put off, however, and coming closer touched me gently with the brush above the eyes.

"It will not hurt you, Fedor," he said with more emotion than I was wont to see him show, "and I am not sure but this day God has made it the means of

saving your life." He turned from me to the prostrate girl, and, bending, placed his hand upon her head.

"Poor child!" he said, and then again, "poor child!" Then straightening himself, he spoke to me:

"Can you carry him alone, Fedor? It will not do to leave him here." I beckoned to the steward who still stood near at hand, and we lifted the wounded man from the floor. The way was clear and no man forbade us, and in this way we went up and out of the unwholesome and dreary place: the steward first, who held the sick man's feet; and I behind him closely, holding up his head; then the girl, still weeping, but failing not to keep jealously near at hand; and lastly the pope, sailing from side to side till his skirts trailed out like a strutting bird, sprinkling the holy water and keeping up to the last the cheerful patter of his prayers.

CHAPTER III

GREGOR IVANOVITCH GARIN died this morning at the hour we should have seen the sun. It is so bleak and chill, and the fog hangs so starkly over everything, that I am of the opinion that if I myself were a ghost about to pass, I should strive to hold to my warm body and not die, rather than venture out uncased in such an air. And truly the man did not seem to want to go.

We brought him to the after cabin and laid him on a long cushion on the floor. The steward, at my order, furnished a basin and stood to help me while I cleansed the wound. But the girl was disturbed in mind and jealous of his service. She went from point to point about us like an uneasy ghost, straightening the man's dress and easing the posture of his limbs, and ended by pushing in between the steward and his task and taking the cloth and basin to herself.

She had ceased her crying and was decently composed, so I made no strong demur. I kept my mind, however, severely on her demeanour, for it disturbs me to have women about me who always weep. But this one, either through natural fortitude of will or courage born of her affection, gave her whole mind steadily to her task and bent herself deftly and intelligently to my direction. Yet I saw her face whiten at the touch of blood, and when I would have thrown away the long hair clipped from about the wound, she made bold to check me and, taking the disordered locks, cleansed

them carefully, dried them, and hid them in the bosom of her dress.

When we had finished this, there was naught else to do but lay the man back and wait patiently till he should choose to go. It is an irony that when the soul has said *dimittis* and would resolve the fight, the body should go on like a run-away machine without the power to end its wasted use. Yet after all, perhaps it is not more strange than that we should here be content to drift in this fog, as we do, without aught save the discretion of the elements and waves.

It was a brave fight the man made for his life—a night and a day and another night, almost, we watched and waited before he consented and was gone. I myself did not see him pass. The pope, the girl, and I divided the watches as seemed fit among us, though the girl would never have left the sick man for a moment if we had given her her way. It was a strange thing that we three should thus labour to a common end and yet each be stirred thereto by such a different spur to action. Pity aside, to me the man was but a surgeon's case, no more, no less, and I ministered to him with my skill because by all the rules he was entitled to fair play in his fight with death.

The pope, true to his cloth, was most concerned that he be made conscious and so be cleanly shrived before he passed away. The word "heretic" heard in the steerage lingered like a maggot in his brain, and had he forgot the need of kindliness and sympathy with the man as one oppressed, he would still, I think, for the honour of the church, have yearned to confess him and seal the sinner's right to salvation by drawing from his own lips that he was yet in harmony with

God. He took his allotment of labour cheerfully and puttered about like a friendly hen, striving in little ways to add to our comforts and attending on the three of us alike. But his thrifty clerical eye was always out —it was his business, I suppose—for the moment which should be the saving of a soul. And even in the night when his watch was off, and he should have been asleep, I saw him more than once steal eagerly out at some unusual sound, tiptoe apologetically over to the patient, and bend above him with wistful eagerness while he listened for the sign of intelligence that would make for him his opportunity.

The girl of course made duty of her love. She had small heart for anything in life and sat for hours, dry-eyed and silent, and watched her father's face. Sometimes when he stirred, she touched him with her hand and spoke to him softly as if he understood. Yet hers was not a despairing grief. I could see that, with the splendid courage of youth, because she hoped the thing might be, her heart believed that there was a chance he would not die. She talked little and we respected her silence and left her to herself. They brought a pallet for my use and spread it near at hand, and so freed for her my room to which, for sleep or dress, she might retire in maidenly seclusion. But never did she go to it except with protest, and each time was back before the space agreed.

The first night of vigil she sat at her father's head, hour after hour, as white and still as if she were no woman, but a marble mourner set upon his tomb. It was outside of nature that she should be so still, and I found an interest in watching her that was close to fascination In the half darkness, with nothing to

busy my attention but my thoughts, I found myself fairly counting between her stirrings as if it had been a game.

"Why," I asked finally, "do you tire yourself when there is no need? There is nothing to do but watch, and in that duty we men here will not fail. Go to your room and rest." She was startled from her reverie by the sound of my voice coming so unexpectedly out of the silence and looked at me with wide-opened eyes. Then, as the meaning of what I had said worked itself into her mind, the light died out again and she sank back apathetically.

"I am not tired," she said dully, and relapsed into the old silence.

"It is not nature then," I insisted, "for what has come to you to-day would not in any other make for rest." She shivered nervously at the recollection and shook her head.

"I cannot," she said, and her lips quivered helplessly. "If he should waken, he would need me; and if he should die—" she stopped and her voice went almost to a whisper, but she gathered herself again and finished bravely—"if he should die, I would not be away."

"He will not waken," I said quietly, but with decision, "and from my knowledge I do not think he will die to-night." She caught hungrily at the crumb of encouragement in the words.

"You think he will live?" she demanded, almost fiercely.

"God knows!" I answered. "But he will not die to-night." She watched me narrowly for some minutes as if I held the secret of the man's recovery in my soul and she would surprise it from me, and in the interval

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she made up her mind. What I had said gave her courage, and her animation returned.

"I will trust you," she said gravely, "and I will go. But—you will call me if there is need?" I bowed in acquiescence and stood for her to pass; and, rising, she went by me to the room. But as she reached the door she stopped uncertainly and then came back and stood before me.

"You have been good to me," she said with feeling, "and I want you to know that I am grateful." Her hands were clasped in front of her and she bowed to me with sober sweetness as she spoke. It struck me suddenly that she was not the child I had thought her, but almost a woman grown. The discovery embarrassed me somewhat, and for the moment I did not know what to say. And she gave me no time for reflection, for, her courtesy ended, she turned and went swiftly back. The door closed behind her and I saw her no more that night.

The following day, despite the gloomy weather, I spent the morning walking above decks. An hour of the time I talked with the captain, who has recovered from his "indisposition," as he is pleased to call it, and has again resumed command. The sea is down and the fog yet holds, but there is a strange smell in the air which the sailors tell me betokens that we are near to land. It has stirred a yearning in me stronger than I supposed was in my heart to feel. So long as landing was impossible, I never gave it thought; but now that the wind brings the earth-savour back to me, I am alive from head to foot with impatience to tread again the shore, and in deadly fear when I remember the terrors of the sea. It would be an uncivil thing indeed of fate

to drown us now, after bringing us so near to our desire.

The captain questioned me concerning the happenings in the hold, and why the man was there on the cabin floor to die. I told him all I knew about the matter, and at the mention of heresy he piously crossed himself and spat three times toward the east. I questioned him, in turn, who the girl and her father were; but he shrugged his shoulders and threw up his hands like a Jew.

"How should I know without looking?" he said. "The herd came to me invoiced by number, like a load of sheep. Who could distinguish among them a particular yearling or a ram?"

"It does not so greatly matter," I returned, "for the man will surely die."

"I should like to have kept him till we get to Sitka," he went on thoughtfully, "for Baranof will hold me strictly to the full number of the list. But if he has to go, encourage him to go without delay. It leans not to good appetite to have a man dying by the table while we sit to eat."

It was the pope's watch when we went below, and I did not see the girl again till well-nigh night. Then I found that she had gathered her hair smoothly and restored to neatness the disorder of her dress. Quiet and rest had wrought their spell with her condition, and her manner, though subdued, had lost the tragic quality I had found in it before. She greeted me without restraint, though there was nothing of the impulsive warmth in her expression which had surprised me the night before.

"You were right," she said quietly, "he is the same to-day as he was last night." There was so much of

surer confidence in her tone that my heart ached for her that I could not enlarge my prophecy and give her promise of his life.

"He was of strong blood," I answered evasively. "Another would have died outright of such a wound." She looked at him proudly and her hand went caressingly across his forehead and hair.

"He was always a good man," she said, "and we lived a quiet life."

"But why did he bring you on such a journey and in so unfit a way? You are not official; but surely you are not of the same class as those cattle forward in the hold." Her eyes sparkled and her face fixed in an expression of great disgust.

"It was that which troubled them!" she burst out. "They were like pigs—beasts! I could not be like them—oh, I could not!"

"But how did it happen that you were there at all?"

"He was not to blame," she answered. "It was my whim to come, and he let me have my way. Thirty years ago, when both were young, my father and Alexander Baranof were friends, and there was need of a physician for this place. We would save money and so took the government passage like the rest. We had no thought," she added with a shudder, "that it would be so bad!"

"You?" I said in surprise, "it was you who wished to go?"

"Yes," she repeated earnestly, "my father would have stayed at Kargopol. It was I who wished to come." I took measure of her slender stature and the delicate lines of her face and neck. Then I thought of the hardship and the work there was to do in the

American wilderness; and of the broad-hipped peasant women, strong as oxen and scarcely more intelligent, whom the government was rightly choosing to send out to be the future mothers of this new Russia in foreign lands.

"In a new country there is room for all, I suppose," I said with a smile; "but so far all the women the government has sent have been of one profession—that of wife." She blushed consciously, but without embarrassment.

"Then I shall be no exception," she said demurely, "and I trust I shall bring no discredit on the name."

"But you are not married!" I said in amazement.

"No, not yet. Not till we come to land. I am betrothed to the lieutenant Alexei Yegorovitch Sookin. He is a soldier and an officer over the soldiers of the Company at Sitka. He could not come to me and so I am going out to him." The information pleased me. It had weighed on my mind what should be done to help her when her natural protector was finally and fully dead, and it was good to find that in losing him her plans had not wholly gone to wreck.

"I am glad for you," I said simply. "I only wish that there was some one in that wide land who looked and watched for me." The girl's eyes filled with tears.

"It must be sorrowful indeed to be alone," she said. "For myself, were it not for Alexei, without my father, I do not think that I could live." I said nothing, and for a space we sat in silence, without looking up. Then she spoke again.

"Perhaps it may not be so bad as you think," she said softly. "Surely the friends that you take with you will not count utterly as naught. I owe to you rescue, if not

my life, and in my house at least there will always be a welcome for you. I shall not forget; and my husband"—she hesitated over the new word and blushed in saying it—"my husband, I know, will wish to thank you, too." She offered me her hand and I took it without a word. It was frankly given, and I felt a thrill of pleasure in her impulsive clasp. I have never cared for women and am awkward in their service; but I have never denied that God made them to add to the comfort of this life. My blood stirred foolishly that she should thus make a comrade of me for all time. But I had no words to tell her so, and beyond a mumble of thanks she got no speech by which to measure my appreciation.

Later, she prepared her father for the night, easing his pillows and smoothing his covers as if he had been a child. The pope had, an hour before, finished his prayers before the ikon, and gone quietly to his room. Then, when all was ready, she turned to me and spoke.

"I shall sleep better to-night," she said bravely, "because I leave him in good hands. I trust you to call me if there is need."

"I will surely call you," I said with positiveness and made certain in my conceit that this was true. There was undoubtedly no thought in my heart of breaking faith with her as I loosened my clothing and drew up the pallet as I had done the night before.

But Gregor Ivanovitch Garin was beyond watcher's help, and I was worn out by what had gone before. I do not know when I dozed, nor how long I lapsed in sleep; but it must have been some hours, for when I wakened it was dawn and the girl was back and lay in a disconsolate heap on the floor at her father's head.

She must have come with great quietness that I did not hear. I raised myself to where I could see the sick man's face. One look told me the truth, and I went quickly to him and felt for the beating of his heart. It was still to my hand and his eyes were turned up under their lids. The girl raised her head and watched me dully. How she had known the end was near and had come, I cannot tell. To me who watched there was no sign, but in some hidden way the call had gone to her.

"He is dead," she said, and her voice was monotonous and without expression. In my shame at my untrustworthiness I found no word to say. She saw my abashed face and went on impassively.

"I do not blame you," she said, "he was not anything to you." It hurt me, though, that where she had put faith in my steadfastness I should have gone so lamely; and after trying vainly for some moments to choose the words that I should speak to her, I gave the matter up and went hurriedly away. But so it came about that of the sorts of interest that separately spurred on the three of us to care for the man, religion slept, curiosity fell careless by the wayside, and only love remembered and was faithful to the end.

CHAPTER IV

ANNA MARYA GREGOROVNA—for that is the name of the girl as it shows on the manifest of the ship—ate no breakfast on the morning after her father's death. For that matter, neither the captain, the pope, nor I sat long at table for the meal. We came as usual at the steward's call, but there was that in the presence of the dead man on the floor and of the girl beside him which proved a bar to appetite. The pope was serene enough. He had come to an age when food is no more than a fuel for life's fires, and so ate sparingly and was quickly done. For, having learned the lesson of ripe years that nature has rights beyond the call of grief, he put his sentiment calmly aside and partook as simply of the repast as if the man's presence gave no cause for holding back.

The captain was uneasy from the start, moved, I suspect, by some superstitious fear of evil glance from the spirit which had so lately split its chrysalis and gone free. He ate hurriedly and cursed under his breath, with one eye on the food and the other on the stiffening body on the floor. It was evident he was eager to escape from the cabin with its threat of ghostly harm, and betake himself again to the wider freedom of the upper air.

I, too, was disturbed in mind, but not through fear. There is a sense of weight that comes to me—as to all thinking men—with the near view of the great change.

If I were a god I could devise no way more profoundly calculated to grow respect in the hearts of beings I had made than to stop the machinery of one occasionally that the rest might know for sure they were but the creatures of my will. Worship is but a thankless task at best, and it cuts deep where one has had no hand in coming to dependence.

Then, too, I felt a smoulder of anger with myself that I had been faithless to the girl's confidence in the matter of watching, and that also served to turn me from the thought of food. But, above all, I found myself looking again and again at her with a curious throb of sympathy. She was so small, and so patient in her grief! The brave way with which she faced the future touched an answering chord in my heart. It was David, if I mistake not, who wept and plead with God while his child was ill, but who, when the young thing died, rose up at once and dried his eyes and went quickly about his work. I have always liked the story, and, as with it, I liked the way the girl took measure of her loss. From the moment of his hurt, she gave her father her whole thought and wrestled unsparingly with God and man for his deliverance from death. But now that he was gone and there was no further use to strive, she no longer let her tears down foolishly, but faced her world bravely and dry-eyed.

I thought of the comradeship she had offered me and the kindly corner promised in her life, and I was ashamed I should be sitting with the others when I might be standing with her as a helper in her need. As I ate, I felt again the frank pressure of her hand and the wide-eyed sympathy of her eyes when she had come to thank me in the night; and it took the taste entirely from my

food. The thought urged to action and, leaving my meal unfinished, I gathered together a cup of tea, sugar, a biscuit and some vodka in a glass, and went to her.

"Drink this, child," I said. "It will not help him—nor would he wish it—that you should go unfed." She roused herself and looked at me, and, in blind obedience to the order, reached out her hand mechanically for what I brought. I placed it beside her on the floor. The bread and spirits she did not touch, but she lifted the sugar to her lips, then changed her mind, and dropping it into the tea in the English fashion, stirred it about and drank the mixture with evident satisfaction. The warmth of it brought the colour back to her face and gave an added impulse to her strength. But her eyes wandered from me to the captain and back again as if there was inquiry in her mind.

"Must I go back now?" she said suddenly.

"Back where?" I asked in turn. The thought was sudden and I did not quickly grasp it.

"Back where you found me," she answered and her eyes went again to the captain at the table, as if she would include him in the interrogation. I understood now what she wanted.

"He will not object," I said soothingly. "We are near land, and for the short time that remains you shall have my room here and stay." Her relief was so great that she made no effort to conceal it.

"I have nothing to give in return," she said, "but if God rewards good deeds there will be much to your credit to-day for your goodness to me, a stranger." The captain had finished his meal and came toward us as she spoke, on his way to the deck above. He intended to pass without notice, but she got to her feet

and made as if she would address him. Evidently he had small wish to talk with her, though he could not help but understand, for he turned his head from her and went briskly by; but she was not to be put off, and called sharply after him.

"Captain," she said, "there is something I would ask you. Will you stop a moment, please?" He snorted ungraciously, and I could see he was considering whether it would be more fearsome to go or to stay. Then, having decided to remain and face the danger, he turned abruptly and came back.

"What is it?" he said shortly. So earnest was her purpose that the girl forgot to be afraid. She looked the captain squarely in the face, and spoke swiftly and without a tremor in her tone.

"Captain," she said, "is it true that we are near the land?"

"Yes," he assented tentatively. I thought her about to ask his consent to her sojourn in the cabin and it annoyed me, seeing that I had told her that I had already arranged the thing.

"Then it will not be more than a day or two till we come to port?"

"No," he answered in the same curt tone.

"Then," she said, her voice rising and her words coming more quickly as she made her point, "I would have it arranged that my father be not buried till we reach the shore." The captain and I looked at each other in surprise. There was an element of strangeness in the request, for it was not the custom to long delay interment on the sea. Then, too, the girl did not plead for the thing as a favour, but calmly announced her intention like one certain and having authority.

She recognised, if we did not, that in her, and her only, lay of right the final disposition of the body of the dead.

I knew, without recalling, the obstinate superstition of men who go down to the sea in ships, and how it would work against the retention of the dead man for the time necessary to bring him safe to land. Furthermore, I remembered that in this case crew, officers, and passengers were alike agreed that the man when alive was a full leaguer with the powers of sin, who had laboured actively for their harm in stirring up the storm. It seemed to me, therefore, that the captain would be set for action different from that demanded by the girl, and I waited with interest to hear what he would say.

He looked up at the girl and he looked down at the floor, but at all times he was careful not to turn his eyes directly on the dead. His colour changed with his mood, and he fidgeted awkwardly with his hands. The girl would not help him and waited for him to speak.

"Well," he began irresolutely, "the thing is, I suppose, a matter of choice. But he will be just as wet ashore in a bed of frozen moss as he ever will be out here in the sea. And for my part, I would rather it were done at once and made an end of." Anna Gregorovna's face flushed at his frank brutality, but she held her ground.

"I would not ask it for myself," she said pleadingly, "but my father had a horror of the sea, and if he is buried in it I know he will not rest." The smoulder of superstitious fear warmed up in the captain at the words. He glanced sidewise at the corpse and crossed himself vigorously twice.

"God forbid," he said piously, "that that should

ever be!" She was quick to notice his uneasiness and, using her advantage, played promptly on his fear.

"Captain," she said, "it is a fearful thing to bind a passing shade against its peace. Surely you would not have it on your soul that through you his ghost must walk through all the years!" The captain shook out his hair with a quick movement of his head, and his breath went out in an inarticulate roar. He looked from one to the other of us for all the world like an animal at bay. I went nearer to him and spoke aside.

"Why not take the chance?" I said under my breath. "It is only for a day, and besides it will help the count with Baranof." He stood in sullen silence for a considerable space, but ended by throwing up his hands in full capitulation.

"Well," he said reluctantly, "I will think about it," and turning to me, added in a lower voice: "In the meantime, for God's sake, get him out of sight!" When he was gone, I turned to the girl with a smile.

"Fear is a strong persuader," I said, "and you have learned well how to put it into use." She neither affirmed nor denied the imputation.

"It is a hateful thing to use," she said simply, "but in the steerage it was a like mummery of fear, I believe, which saved my life. Before you came I said charms to keep the people back—I learned to do it in a play—and they were afraid and let me go. It was because they thought my father taught them to me that they tried to throw him from the ship."

"You will be happier here," I said.

"Not happy, but I shall not be afraid. I am glad of the comfort and safety of the refuge. But do you think," she added with a sudden change of thought,

"that someone would go forward and bring out my things?"

"What are they?" I asked.

"Two boxes and the rugs we used as covers for our beds."

"Can I get them alone?"

"I will go with you," she answered. "I am not afraid."

"Very well," I said, but I had in mind the strong injunction of the captain that the dead man should be put out of sight, and it did not seem the part of wisdom to delay the matter.

"Before we go," I added, "I must see that your father is cared for and set decently aside." The pope helped me, and between us we lifted the mattress with the dead man on it and carried the sagging burden to the pope's room. Then, dismissing the girl for the moment, I washed the man's face and neck, smoothed his hair naturally back, tied his hands decorously across his breast, and sent the pope above to flatten bullets to lay upon his eyes.

It came to me to search the body for papers or things of value that should be preserved, and in an inner pocket I found a slender purse containing gold. There was nothing else of value on him, save that round his neck was a chain from which hung the Greek cross the girl had instanced as showing him still within the faith. It was a thing of worth, with chasing and enamel on the gold of the face, and in the centre was set a coloured stone.

I unclasped it, carefully folded up the chain, and, with an idea of looking strictly to its safety, placed it together with the purse in the inner pocket of my coat.

I had not seen the girl, but as I did it I felt a touch upon my arm and, turning, found her standing closely at my side.

"Give them to me," she said slowly. "Surely you would not rob the dead!" Her manner showed more of agitation than of real distrust, but there was enough of accusation in her eyes to make my blood surge wildly up within me.

"I meant no harm!" I exclaimed hotly. "I only took the things that they might be kept for you." She flushed till her whole face and neck were red, and bent her head down till I could not see her eyes.

"I knew it at heart," she said humbly, "but trouble has made treacherous things of both my temper and my faith."

I took out the jewel and the purse and threw them on the bench. She lifted the cross and chain and clasped them again round the dead man's neck.

"It has never left him since he was a child," she said softly, "and I know that he would miss it if we took it now." When it was done, she rose and came quite close to me.

"I do not know what you must think of me," she said impulsively. "It seems that I am always doing something that needs apology to you. It is not easy to tell you I was wrong, but I am quite sure that in my heart I had no doubt of your good faith." She was pleasant to look at with her air of appealing contrition, and her desire to be understood was so genuinely a charge upon her feelings that I found small difficulty in granting what she asked.

"I understand," I said with some embarrassment. "There will be no need to speak of it again." Then,

to bridge the awkwardness of the pause and bring us back to common things, I added: "I have finished here. If you like now, we can make our journey forward."

She looked at me with sudden gratitude and bowed in acquiescence. We went out without speaking; and as I remember it no word was spoken till we reached the hold. The peace of forgiveness comes at times more certainly through silence than through words.

The hold had been cleaned since we were there before, but nothing could strip from it entirely its air of bleak and wretched desolation. The girl took the lead and advanced at once to the dimly lighted spot which, to the time of his injury, she and her father had claimed as their own. There were boxes and rugs in plenty all about, but she knew where her own had been, and went directly to the place. I was interested that no one in the cabin spoke to her. The men were simply indifferent to her presence, but the women looked up at her with quick, disdainful eyes, crossed themselves vigorously, and turned sullenly away.

She paused at last in the darkened corner, where on my first visit we had stood at bay, and, stooping, felt along the wall for the boxes. But they were not where she had expected to find them, and she turned to me in some dismay.

"They have been moved," she said nervously. "We shall have to ask where they have been put."

"Do not worry," I said soothingly. "It is likely the captain has had them stowed away for fear they would be robbed. I will send for the steward and ask him." Calling one of the hands I charged him with the message, and while he went she walked impatiently up and down and bit her lips to hide her growing agita-

tion. Before I did, she saw the steward coming, but waited bravely for me to question him, though she hung with eager interest on his words.

"Steward," I said, "what has become of this woman's belongings while she has been away?" He looked from one to the other of us with nervousness that was ill concealed. His face showed the uneasy consciousness of unwelcome news, though in speaking he in no wise voiced it in his words.

"I cannot tell you, sir," he said with assumed frankness. He edged around till his back was toward Anna Gregorovna and she could not see his face. Then his eyes lighted with the intelligence he had concealed from her, and with an effort of his lips, rather than his throat, he blurted out the truth.

"They are gone," he said, and his voice was scarce above a whisper. "They were all thrown overboard in the night."

I glanced at Anna Gregorovna to see if she had heard. The steward's voice had been too low to carry to her the meaning of his speech, but it was not hid from her that he had spoken and she guessed the truth from the expression of my face.

"They have not dared!" she said fiercely, and came swiftly around to where she could look into the steward's eyes. Neither of us had heart or word to make her answer, but our looks were guilty pleaders for the truth. For full a moment she devoured us with her angry eyes. Then the light went suddenly out of her face and she seemed to grow visibly smaller as she shrank into herself.

"Don't tell me!" she cried piteously. "I cannot bear it!" and threw up her hands in eloquent appeal.

Her whole body shook with her excitement and she swayed so from side to side I thought she would surely fall. But she gathered herself bravely, and covering her face walked unsteadily to a near-by chest and sat herself limply down. Her head drooped forward till her elbows rested on her knees, her breath came in great sobs and then the fountains of the deep were opened and the tears came down like rain.

It stirs me always to see a woman weep, and here I was the more disturbed because I found her weakness a surprise. With the fine fatalism of the women of our race she had accepted the fiercer buffets of fortune that had come to her, patiently and with serenity of soul. She had shown no weakness when she had made shift to defend her father's life and she had mourned him at his death dry-eyed. But now in this minor trial, when there was nothing at stake for her but a parcel of foolish goods, she wept like a child and made wreck of her self-control.

"Oh, the good things!" she cried between her sobs, "—my wedding clothes—and the linen for the house! What have I done that I should have to go to him like this!" There was that in her wrongs which stirred my very bones to action. I had to do something, and before I knew it I had the steward by the throat and shook him as if he had been a rat.

"You villain!" I exclaimed. "You knew this and you did not tell me before?" He fought himself free and answered breathlessly:

"I only heard it as I came," he said sullenly and, breathing hard, he stood back from my reach and fell to feeling tenderly of his neck.

"I have no quarrel with you then," I rejoined

apologetically. "But who was it that threw out the things?"

"It was some of these," he answered, waving his hand toward the group around the hold. The girl heard him, though she had not seemed to listen while he spoke.

"But why did they do it?" she interjected breathlessly. The steward hesitated in fear of giving her offence.

"I think it was because you made the spells," he said cautiously. "The things were yours and might do them harm, and they threw them out because they were afraid."

"Then they were afraid," she said between her teeth. She sat for some moments looking straight before her, while her anger wrestled with her grief. The anger conquered, for she dried her eyes, and standing up, began to look fixedly at first one and then another of the groups of people in the place. Her fingers worked spasmodically and for the moment she seemed to have lost the power of self-control.

"And they were afraid!" she repeated ironically, as if to herself. "Very well then! Since they would do it, they shall pay for it in fear." Before we could stop her, she had caught down her hair with a swift touch of her hand and, with a shake of her head, went gliding out away from us along the floor. She did not seem to walk, but bent and swung in changing curves with a rhythmic motion that was curiously like a bird's.

The people in the cabin did not see her till she was half way down the room. Then there was a frightened cry of warning that ran like fire from lip to lip. Those beyond her stood not on the order of their going and

crowded in mad haste out through the open door. But the poor fools this side who found her between them and the only avenue of escape saw no way open for them by which they might resolve the burden of their fears. They did not dare to pass lest the evil of her glance should light on them and blight; and yet they were wholly heartsick when they thought to stay. The men gave way till they faced the danger with their backs against the wall. Their wives and children clung to them in panic, and the latter hid their faces in their mother's skirts. One woman in her fright went on her knees and with babbling voice began to pray aloud.

The girl was a good actress and had been well taught. She threw herself into the mimicry with an abandon that was not good to see. So strong was the unhallowed seeming of it all that, though I knew it to be but a sham, at times, as I watched her, the goose-flesh rose and quivered all along my back. The steward not being in the secret was in as great a pother as the rest, and once, when her eyes rested upon him for a moment and she paused and seemed about to single him out for notice, I heard his teeth chatter as if he had a chill.

At first she did not speak, though her lips moved constantly, as if she were weaving some fatal web of speech, too subtle to be told aloud. Her eyes were set above her victims' heads in wide unseeing gaze, and at times she stooped down and made cabalistic markings with her finger on the floor. Suddenly she changed her plan and stopped short in one of her whirlings round, to point with accusing finger at one of the shrinking figures by the wall.

"Arseni Kuznetzof," she said in her clear voice,

"when you helped destroy my father's things, did you think of the time when your Marfa was mad with the crying sickness and he gave her that which helped her and made her well? No, but when she is sick again in the new land where we shall come, you will remember what you have done to him and to me. You will pray for her and you will weep and your friends will pour out fear. But it will avail you nothing, for my father is dead and the succour cannot come again. And she will be sick, Arseni; she will be sick!"

The man quailed visibly as if she had struck him a body blow. His wife, at the mention of her name, dropped on the floor beside him, and, as the girl ended her bitter charge, caught him about the knees and burst hysterically into tears. He was too strongly dazed to think of an answer and, flatted against the wall as if he would push through, stood motionless with his eyes glued on Anna Gregorovna in helpless fascination. But I saw his hand go down with awkward tenderness to the head of the frightened woman at his side, and he drew forward the skirt of his long coat so that it hid her face.

But, the diatribe ended, the girl did not stop to measure its effect. She was off again across the room, looking for another face sufficiently familiar to justify attack. She found it half way down the circle and pointed the accusing finger as before.

"Vassili Shapkin," she began, and paused. The man, a stout fellow with a shock of hair that almost hid his eyes, turned his back upon her promptly, lifted his shoulders, bent down his head, and awaited her attack. But it did not come as he had thought. Anna Gregorovna had overestimated her strength and the

break came as she singled him by name. She staggered slightly and her extended hand went groping out as if she could not see. I sprang forward to her, but before I reached her side she swerved dizzily in her place, cried out, and fell headlong to the floor. Her fall broke the spell that had held her audience bound. Before she was down, they were in mad stampede to put the distance between them and her which should take them outside the baleful circle of her eyes.

I stooped above the girl and shook her to bring her back to life, but she was wholly limp and gave no answering heed. I loosened her dress and chafed her hands and considered what to do. It took no especial skill to decide her danger not to be extreme. It was a case which time would cure and that without good offices from me. But it would not do to leave her to the mercy of the people she had banned, and I set myself to getting her away. The steward had deserted and bolted with the rest, and, there being no other way, I gathered her up against me and lifted her in my arms.

It was the first time I had ever so held a woman to me, and I was glad I was alone. But I think the one feeling that was strongest in me when I came to think it over was astonishment that I should find her such a load. Women always affect me with a sense of their delicacy and small size, and this girl had seemed so slender I was startled to find her of such weight.

I arranged her with her head in comfort on my shoulder, and with no little difficulty hoisted myself up the ladder and so got clear of the hold. As I reached the deck I saw the stampeders gathered about the captain in excited crowd and gesticulating wildly in their efforts to make him understand. They stopped

awkwardly as I passed and stood gaping at my limp burden with a rigidity of terror that was almost awe. The captain's face was as suspicious as the rest.

I passed them in silence and descended the cabin stairs. The girl still hung a dead weight in my arms, and the moisture stood freely out on me before I got her to her berth. I unscrewed the port and struck her face gently with a moistened cloth, and at length she moved her head and gave signs of returning life. But she had not opened her eyes when the steward, peering cautiously around the door, spoke softly to me and beckoned me outside.

"The captain wants you," he said hurriedly. "You will find him on the deck." He spoke with one eye always on the door as if he expected momentarily to see Anna Gregorovna burst out and pounce upon him where he stood; and, his message delivered, without waiting for an answer he as promptly went away.

I looked back into the room and assured myself that my patient could be safely left to finish her own cure, and, straightening somewhat the disorder of my dress, I took heed of the captain's summons and went obediently above. He looked at me for full a minute in silent indignation before he could trust himself to speak.

"A nice mess you and your hell-cat have stirred up with these people," he burst out harshly. "Is she dead?"

"No," I said. "It is nothing but a faint."

"The more the pity! I had hoped to bury both of them at once." He was so frankly crestfallen at the failure of his plan, that I laughed in sheer enjoyment of his discomfiture.

"Surely," I said, "you do not believe that she could really conjure those cattle to their hurt?" He shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly.

"One never knows," he said gravely, "and I saw some of it myself." I felt it would be but harm to the girl to keep her secret from him, so I told him what she had confessed to me and how it chanced that she had set herself to take pay for her lost goods in fear. He heard me silently and with evident relief. But, when all was said, there was still a lingering suspicion that rankled in his mind.

"Well," he said finally, "if she is not dead, she must needs stay on board, but she had better keep her cabin if she sets store on her life. And this at least she has lost by taking toll; the man goes overboard as soon as we can sew him up."

I laboured with him strenuously, but his mind was already made; and truly without some such concession to their superstitious fear, there was strong chance of mutiny among both passengers and crew. So at last I left him and went down in the growing dusk to break the matter to the girl.

She had recovered so far as to close and bolt the door, and the only tangible sign I had of her was the convulsive sobbing from within, which served to wear out her grief. I knocked again and again, but she would not open to me. There was a light in the pope's room, and I found the sailmakers working with the body and preparing it for its final plunge. The captain had not waited when his mind was once made up, and the men had been set to begin their gruesome work while I yet made argument with him on the deck. I watched them helplessly, and, as I found the heart,

went back to the task of making Anna Gregorovna hear.

The men finished their task and went away. The place settled down to its wonted evening calm, and the only sound that broke the stillness was the stifled catch of the girl's breath that still came to me through the door. Then I heard the pope descend from the deck and pass through the cabin to his room. When he came out again he was clad in his priestly robes. He came over to me and bowed to me as courteously as if I had been a stranger.

"The captain is about to bury Gregor Ivanovitch Garin," he said in an undertone. "If his daughter desires to be present, it behooves her to come at once."

"I have not been able to make her hear," I answered. "The door is locked and she thinks the body is to stay." The pope's face became wistful, and he clasped his hands together and sighed as if the girl's grief had been his own.

"I know," he said sadly. "I, too, tried to move the captain, but it was of no effect. I am going now," he added, putting his hand upon my arm, "but you will try once more, I know, to reach the unhappy creature before it is too late." He moved away with his serene step; and turning again to the door, I addressed myself to the task before me.

"Anna—Anna Gregorovna," I called, "do you hear me there inside? If you would see your father this one more time, open without delay." Either she had become more calm or there was that in my demand which had convinced her of the need. I heard a movement as of feet, the rustle of her dress, and the key clicked in the lock as she sprang it sharply back. She

opened the door half round and stood holding by the latch. Her face was swollen with much weeping, her dress disordered, and the pathetic droop of her figure gave earnest proof of her distress. I told her in few words what had happened, but she passed it by almost as if she did not hear.

"It does not matter," she said apathetically, but she turned away and passed her hand before her eyes. Then she came out of the room, moving unsteadily like one in a dream, and made as if she would have gone to where her father was.

"Do not go there!" I said sharply. "He is no longer as he was and you will be happier away."

"I am not afraid," she said simply, and went steadily on. I think the close-canvassed figure with the shot at its feet was a shock to her as it had been to me when I saw it first. But she said nothing and went close to it and touched it here and there tenderly with her hand.

"I would have liked to see his face," she said drearily, "and now that naught else remains, I wish I had kept the cross." It would be no hardship to repair the break, and it came to me to unstitch the canvas and gratify her wish. With my knife I cut the seams along the head and laid back the cloth that covered up the face.

It was not a pleasant sight, for the leads had been too light to firmly hold the lids, and the eyes were wide and staring into space. I would have covered him again, but she stayed me and bent above him with a gentleness of love that made it certain that she at least did not see in him the sunken horror that death had wrought, but only the gracious kinship she had known in life.

There were steps on the floor without, and looking

I saw that the bearers were coming to carry out the dead.

"We must be quick," I said, and drew up the flap again into its place. The girl's hand was on mine and she held me back.

"The cross," she said thickly—"I want to take the cross." She thrust her hand carefully beneath the canvas and felt about his neck. Then, with a cry, she went searching down along the body as far as the narrow cover would permit. With mad haste she pushed down the flap, tearing at the stitches till the breast was exposed and both of us could see. And then she rose up and looked at me with a great and bitter accusation in her eyes. For the chain was not about the man's neck, and it and the jewel were no longer there.

CHAPTER V

ANNA GREGOROVNA made no charge against me beyond the accusation of her eyes. And this fact I prize, in that she had no knowledge of other attendance on her father than my own, and I alone had held the secret of the cross. To me, of course, the explanation was not far to seek. Somehow the sailmakers had come upon the jewel while they encased the dead, and with their work done and the body sewed up securely against search, they had felt free and safe to take the relic for their pains.

But all this time the girl had been shut up with her grief and had no knowledge of these things. So it was not strange that, coming unwarned upon her loss, the waters of her bitterness welled up uncalled.

Perhaps, though, the outcome would have differed had there been longer time. For while we stood and looked, the men came in from the cabin and signified their wish to take the body out. I drew up the canvas hastily so as to hide the uncovered face, and tucked in the loosened edges as I might. The girl watched me in silence with the same look of agonised interrogation in her eyes. I thought she would speak, but when the bearers lifted the body and prepared to go, she turned her gaze wholly upon them with like mournful interest, and as they passed out, she followed close behind them without another glance at me.

The pope met the small procession as it cleared the

hatches and led us to the ship's quarter, where a bier had been made ready with a convenient board. On this the man was placed, and the pope, taking station at the head, began to chant the service for the dead. It was more than black above, but two torches which had been set up near at hand, made visible the face of the priest and his purple robe, and sent the shadows dancing grotesquely over the familiar things around.

If there were other watchers of the ceremony, they remained outside the circle of light. Once or twice I thought I caught murmured responses to the chants, but when it came to the prostrations, Anna Gregorovna and I went through them by ourselves. Steadying herself by a shroud, she stood quietly by and made no protest or even lamentation. She responded mechanically to the calls of the service, but there was that in her manner which showed how near she was to breaking down.

When all was done and the last prayer said, the men lifted the body to the rail and waited for the final benediction of the priest before letting it go down. Anna Gregorovna quailed before this, the supreme test of parting, and involuntarily I put out my hand to steady her lest she should fall. She saw the action and looked at me with dull eyes, and then with a shiver of recollection, she drew herself away. The momentary distraction, however, was enough to recall her to herself and she turned to the side of the vessel, and with both hands on the rail watched bravely while the body slid over into the sea.

As the bearers poised their burden for the plunge, the loosened flap of cloth fell down on the dead man's breast, leaving the head exposed, and the last we saw

of Gregor Ivanovitch Garin was his awful face, sucked down like a drowning man's to death, with his open eyes turned up as if appealing, and the bubbles gathering like his last breath above the spot where he went down.

Startled out of her composure by the unexpected horror, the girl leaned far down across the bulwark, stretched out her hands as if in succour, and cried out aloud. And then a strange thing happened. For scarcely was the sound of her voice dead in our ears, when, from somewhere out in the foggy sea, beyond the limit lighted by our torches, there came back, as if in answer, the sound of a human voice.

In its unexpectedness, the sound had all the seeming of a coming from the dead and stirred us with an oppressive sense of mystery. Every man among us crossed himself with vigour, and the girl undoubtedly felt it as a resurrection, for after listening intently for a moment, she leaned further out and called again. Like an echo, there came back the answer, as surely as before. But this time the sound was distinctly nearer and like a thing of earth; and as I listened I clearly caught along with it the muffled sound of oars. Those about me heard them at the same time, and one of the men snatched up a torch, and thrusting it forward and high above his head, waved it to increase the flame and widen out the light in the direction from which the sound had come. But the mist shut us in like a veil, and after a moment's pause, he threw the torch with all the strength of his arm far out into the sea. As it dropped, there was a sudden shout of consternation from the distance, and then the torch sank sputtering into the waves. But in the instant, we had seen out there a boat of size, and the shadowy figures of the men who occupied it.

The girl gave a great sob and ran back from the rail. What she had hoped for, I know not, but it had been sufficiently of worth to her that her disappointment in not finding it was great. She waited no further tidings, but, covering her face, slipped quietly away and went down again below.

Not so the rest of us. The lure of curiosity held us straining out into the gray, in eager questioning who those strange voyagers might be. And as the news spread through the ship, those hearing came by twos and threes, till well-nigh all our company was leaned against the side.

There was a sharp command from the captain and the mate came hurriedly down among us, and, seizing the other torch, dropped it blazing into the sea.

"No lights for the Spaniards!" he said grimly. "Let them get their gauge of us in some other way."

Up to this moment I think that none of us had guessed the strangers as anything but friends. But with the mate's words came the recollection of rumours heard at starting concerning an unhallowed alliance against us of England and Spain; and I remembered that at Okhotsk there had been talk of a Spanish vessel sent from California to harry our defenceless northern coast. And so it became but ordinary caution to put out our lights and look askance at these unnamed visitors, come to us like ghosts out of the night, and in all things to charge ourselves as best we might against their threatened piracies.

And in this stress I found need to raise the captain up again in my esteem. When he turned coward in the storm and left us in the hand of God, he dropped down fairly to the floor of my regard, and later I had found

him food for bitter humour in his superstitious terror of the girl. But now, with only man to fight, and with no superstitious fear upon him, he showed himself both ready and fit for the work he had to do.

The women were sent below; such arms as the ship afforded came from their stowage and were served out to such as understood their use; and watches were quickly set at intervals along the rails to warn us of sinister approaches from all sides. Meanwhile, the boat had answered to our hail, and having come to us, lay rubbing up and down against our side with the long lifting of the sea.

Our defences being complete, the captain ordered a light and lowered it over the side, till we could clearly see the men and boat below. The craft was a large skin canoe, such as is used by the natives of these northern seas, and in it were eight men, half of whom were white. Both brown and white looked at us with what seemed to me more of fear than of eagerness to fight. Had it not been that our guns were pointed at them, I think even then they would have run away. On their part, they made no shift to signal us, but talked excitedly and in low tones among themselves. The captain leaned over the bulwark and called to them.

"Who are you?" he said commandingly. There was a moment's excited conference in the boat, and then the man in the stern, who seemed to be in authority, spoke up and answered hesitatingly, but in our own tongue:

"Friends."

"Are you armed?"

"No," came promptly back the answer.

"How many boats are there of you?"

"There is but one. We are alone."

"Then come aboard and I will talk with you," said the captain.

A rope ladder was let down, and a man at the stern and a companion came climbing up the side. As they reached the deck, each man was seized by two sturdy seamen and led to where the captain stood. They made no resistance, and after a moment spent in searching them for hidden weapons, the guards released them and left them standing by themselves.

"Bring a light here," said the captain. The mate lifted a torch and carried it around so as to throw its illumination on the leader's face. Then, with a cry of astonishment, he thrust it into the hand of the nearest sailor and, rushing to the stranger, threw his arms around his neck and kissed him on both cheeks.

"Ivan!" he shouted, "is it only you?" The stranger peered at him in startled inquiry.

"Ssava!" he gasped in joyful recognition. His voice was almost a shout, and he fell to returning the mate's embrace with eager interest. There was a fire of excited question between the two, during which we waited, and then the mate, recovering himself with belated thought as to his duty, turned apologetically to the captain.

"It is my brother," he said joyfully, "who has been in America with the Company for seven years. We are near port and the fog is low. Yesterday, from the high ground, they saw our masts above the mist and believed we were the Spaniards, of whom they, too, have been in fear. This boat was sent to spy us out, and had it not been for the accident of the burial, they would not have made themselves known until they were cer-

tain who we were. They thought it was the Spaniards who had captured them," he shouted, turning to his brother and slapping him on the back, "and at the same time we thought it was the Spaniards come to capture us!" He capered like a boy, and, rushing to the side, called out to the men below:

"Come up," he bawled, "come up and be eaten as Ivan Zavialof has been!" There was an instant stir in the canoe and a wave of startled comment ran through it from stem to stern. Ivan Zavialof went to his brother's side and checked his childishness. Taking his place, he spoke reassuringly to the frightened prisoners, and in another moment they were climbing eagerly up onto our decks.

And yet when the thing was over, I was not wholly happy in my mind. The certainty that we were not to fight brought a distinct feeling of relief, though we were well prepared for combat and in the fighting would have made good account. It was the lessening of nerve tension, I suppose, and the fact that I was unstrung from the excitement of the death and burial that had gone before. There was uneasiness of thought, if nothing more, and I found no lightness or elation in my thankfulness for our escape. But this was not the case with the majority, for no sooner was the matter proved and the opportunity gone, than the whole ship bubbled over like children with joy at the delivery. So, while to be in fashion, I took congratulations and made no sign to spoil the pleasure of the rest, inside I held my thought and found small interest in the roystering.

It was not a mood that leaned toward quiet in me, and I set my mind to think of something that would give me active work; and as I canvassed the opportunities

that came up in my thought, I could think of nothing more seasonable than to seek out the sail-makers forward and retrieve the stolen cross. There was a scent of unpleasantness about the matter that had appeal for me.

But whatever of adventure there promised in the task, it failed of savour in the realisation. I found the fellows almost without search. They had felt so certain in their filching, and had judged the chance so wide that could lead to their undoing, that they had no story ready, and gave up their ill-gotten plunder without bluster or appeal. So I returned to my cabir with small comfort in my soul, and there my temper was not improved by finding that the steward had forgotten to lay out my bed. I found some relief in doing this myself, but when it was done, I had no heart for going again on deck and so retired. But I should have liked to get my hand upon the steward before I laid me down.

It was the first night of four which had been without alarms, and I saw and heard nothing till morning. Then the waking was to a new and different world. My grievances had flown, the fog had lifted, and the sky was soft with the wet blue of spring. The sea was level as a floor, and the breeze had just enough of strength to set us moving on it. But the thing which changed the setting and gave to it its thrill of novelty and charm was the great rim of firm ground that stretched along and filled the eastern sky-line and woke up in us the belief that soon again we should go free-footed on dry land.

God knows, however, that there was little pleasure in the prospect outside of this idea. I never saw a land that gave back less of human sympathy. All the coast was hills, abrupt and snowbound and covered with

close timber down to the water's edge. Off to the north was one clear peak as white and round as a woman's breast. But in all the distance there was no sign of human interest or occupation, and the clearness of the air hardened the outlines of trees and rocks and hills as if in this new place Nature had found no time for the soft graces, but faced her fact, stripped grimly to the buff. The captain, too, found pleasure in the prospect, and fairly laughed as I saluted him.

"It is worth while to see the sun," he said cheerfully. "I am sorry I did not throw that beggar overboard three days ago." I looked for the strangers of the night before, but the decks were empty and there was no sign of them aboard.

"Where is the boat?" I asked.

"It is gone," the captain answered. "They went away at dawn to carry the dispatches to the port and make ready for our coming." I scanned the shore for signs of human habitation.

"Where is the port?" I said finally. He pointed to the north.

"Yonder it is; over that low point." But it might as well have been hidden altogether so far as the comfort to be derived from it was concerned, for, to the untrained eye, the place that was the town was but a darker and distincter spot of color against the background of the hills.

It was past noon when we made our landing and let the anchor creak down into the sea. The pope and I watched the process from the deck and together took tale of the strange view ashore. Our eyes went with curious questioning over the great palisade and along the long, low, fort-like buildings of the post. But I

could see that the pope's interest was not with these, and that he turned from them always to the irregular fringe of hovels outside of the great fence, which evidently served as homes to the natives of the place.

"A new land and a new life," he said musingly. "Fedor, I almost envy you in being young."

"Why so?" I answered. "Age is altogether a question of the heart. What matters it so long as that is young?"

"True," he said dreamily, "true, and in some ways I have tried. But—while we all agree that the heart must be kept young—when it comes to the practice, who of us knows how?" I found a sudden pleasure in finding him thus melancholy, in the hope that his delusion might be passing and that the break would prove the beginning of the end.

"The work can have no soul without the uplift," I began softly, but he broke in upon my word.

"It is not that," he said impatiently. "I have not lost the zeal. I am jealous, simply, that I have not your strength. Think of this great field and what could be done in it if I were young as you. Look at this one spot alone," and lifting his arm he let it swing round the whole circle of the shore. "Is it not enough to make a man sigh for strength?"

And truly, if I had been a soul hunter, in summing up that prospect I should have felt the sportsman's thrill. Nearly three hundred native canoes lay between us and the beach, and their Indian owners were gathered in picturesque groups about the fires along the shore. Their number was so great that I knew the old man felt like a hunter who has flushed a royal covey and yet has but a single gun.

"You will not need to look farther," I said, determined to make a point somewhere. "There are enough heathen here for you to practise on all the remaining years of your life." He shook his head soberly.

"My work is not here," he said; "these souls are already within the circle of light, and I was called to go out to those who have not yet known God."

We stood and looked till the boats were ready to take us ashore. Then I thought to look for Anna Gregorovna and see that she came safely to the land. She was still below, and I sent a man to tell her of the going. Presently she came on deck, but paused before she reached us and stood a space apart. Her eyes went to the shore and the huddled buildings of the post, and the colour rose in her cheeks as she thought of what the prospect meant to her. I went to where she stood and spoke a word of sympathy.

"This is the end of the sea-faring," I said. "I hope it is the beginning of happier days for you." She did not answer, and half turned away, and for the moment I thought she would leave me where I stood. Then she thought better of it and turned to me with pleading eyes.

"What is it?" I said. "Why will you not speak to me?"

"I cannot help it," she said tremulously. "Before we go, will you not give me back my cross?"

The blood went hotly up to my cheeks and I found no word to say. It had not seriously stayed with me that she would persist in her suspicions of me as the thief, and now that it was so, I was embarrassed how to return the thing without fixing her finally in her belief. I had had no thought in its retrieving but the cross

should be restored, but now the impulse was strong to make denial and choose another time for the return.

I have ever found it that, in the end, the blunt truth wins, however much it seems to lack of potence at the time when it is told; and I say this too in the face of the disadvantage that has come to me in the matter of the killing of the Chuckchi. If I had chosen to lie about that, I might still have been at Okhotsk.

The temptation, however, passed for me in a moment. I cursed myself inwardly for a fool and settled in my mind that, come what would, I would act now and have the matter over with. Unbuttoning my coat I drew out the cross and, without a word of palliation or excuse, placed it in her hand.

She took it mechanically and stood looking blankly from it to me with a surprise that was closely allied to bewilderment. Then as the bitter force of the thing swept over her, her look changed to one of trouble, and, turning away from me, she leaned her head against the shroud and bent so that I could not see her face. The hand that held the cross dropped lightly to her side and the jewel slid unnoticed to the deck. Her shoulders drew forward in her struggle for self-control and I could see that she was crying softly to herself.

"Then it was you, after all, who took it," she said brokenly. "Oh, why did you give it back?" I stooped and lifted the cross again and held it out to her.

"Can you not understand," I said, "that if my hands had not been clean in the matter, I should not have brought it back to you?" And then I told her all the truth about the sail-makers and how, later, the thing had been regained. She heard me through in

silence and did not raise her head; but when I had done, and she had taken time sufficient to dry up her tears, she faced me bravely and held out her hand.

"I will take it now," she said, "and I will tell you I am very glad. Not alone for the cross," she added softly, "though I should have missed it more than I should like to think. But the great comfort comes in the thought that I need not go out from this dreadful place feeling that in any single thing you have been unkind."

CHAPTER VI

THE passage from ship to shore was short and uneventful. We threaded our way carefully among the maze of boats, and the tide being high, passed easily through the channel that wound like a tortuous snake between the banks of mud, and so came to an easy landing on dry ground. We were the first to disembark and all the population of the post was there to welcome us. The larger part were natives, hunters, and hangers-on of the fort, and as I looked them over the opinion grew that they were by far the most repulsive creatures I had ever seen. Assuredly, if they were as bad inside as out, they had strong need of the pope and all his kind to bring them even to a scant salvation. They stood respectfully in the background and yielded the post of vantage to those of our own colour whom fate had thrown as flotsam on this shore.

Anna Gregorovna kept close beside me as we walked, and I could see that she challenged every new face in momentary expectation of discovering her lover in the crowd. The boat being cleared, we followed the sailor who brought out our goods, and began a progress toward the higher ground. As we neared the group of spectators, they parted so as to let us pass through, and a tall man with black mustachios and a suspicion of a swagger in his air stepped out from among them and saluted me in the military fashion.

"You are Fedor Kirilovitch Delarof?" he said with

an air of importance. When I had assented, he continued: "The commander, Alexander Andreievitch Baranof is busy with his dispatches and could not come. I am charged by him to show you to the quarters he has assigned to you in the post. Joassaf Petrovitch is to remain with you for the present." I was surprised at the attention, for I had not thought of myself as coming as an honoured guest.

"And the lady here," I said, "what disposition has been made for her?" He looked at her curiously and bowed with full respect; but I could see from his manner she was not within the order he had brought.

"She is Anna Marya, the daughter of Gregor Ivanovitch Garin, who died on the passage across the sea. She is the betrothed of the Lieutenant Alexei Yegorovitch Sookin, and if no disposition has been made for her, it would be well to send for him." At the mention of the lieutenant's name the man looked up quickly at the girl with a new interest, and bowed again.

"Though I have had no instruction in the matter," he said courteously, "I shall be glad to serve Anna Gregorovna as I can. The Lieutenant Sookin is indisposed and cannot leave his room. I had best speak to Marfa Ekaterina Baranof." He turned to carry out his purpose, but Anna Gregorovna called him back. At the mention of her lover's sickness she had started forward and now only waited till he had stopped speaking to question him for herself.

"Wait," she said breathlessly, "Alexei Yegorovitch—is he very ill?" The man stopped and half turned back to her, but before he spoke he looked at me and his eye drew down in what, if I had known him better, I should have thought to be a wink.

"No, panna," he said cheerily. "He has had trouble with his throat from the winter cold, but he will soon be out again." He did not wait for her to say more, but added: "If you will follow me, I will take you to Marfa Alexandrovna," and walked on.

We had almost passed the spectators, when I saw coming toward us a young girl of perhaps eighteen years of age. She was a pretty creature with brown hair and eyes, and a skin of pure olive sufficiently transparent to let the colour through it at her cheeks. But a certain heaviness of figure and the high angle of the facial bones told me at once that she was a half-breed, or creole as they are wrongly called in this land, and had Indian blood in her veins.

She led by the hand a little boy of perhaps seven or eight years, who jumped up and down with impatience, yet did not venture to let go her grasp. Our guide perceived her as I did, and stopping us with a gesture, waited her approach. She saw us and turned her steps to where we stood. Pausing in front of us, she looked inquiringly at our conductor and waited for him to speak, but before he could do so her attention was taken from him by the child who still danced up and down and pulled impatiently at her gown.

"Do not stop, Marfa," he said pleadingly. "We shall be late, and I want to be there when they come." The girl did not look down at him, but put her arm about his shoulders and drew him back against her side.

"Hush, Paul," she said in a low voice, "they are here now."

"Where are they now?" he insisted in his high,

clear speech. "I do not hear them." She gave herself up to the interruption and bent above him soothingly.

"They are here—in front of you. There are three of them, a young man, a woman and a priest. Now listen a moment and you will hear them speak." The child did not look at us but stood silent, with his head tilted slightly back and one foot moving flutteringly forward as if he were feeling of the ground. Marfa Alexandrovna straightened herself awkwardly and then looked at us with the signs of some confusion showing in her face.

"I trust you will forgive my brother's forwardness," she said simply. "He is blind." Then turning to our guide, she said with dignity:

"What is it, Peter? Is there something for me to do?"

"There is a lady here," he answered, "concerning whose disposition I have not been charged." The creole looked at once at Anna Gregorovna with genuine interest, but it was patent that she had had no previous knowledge of her coming. Anna Gregorovna, for her part, shrank nervously from the scrutiny, and I spoke to her for comfort.

"The captain has taken his revenge," I said under my breath; "he has not announced you to the commander." She looked up at me suddenly and then back at the other woman without a word; but the creole recovered from her astonishment and came to where she stood.

"There has been some mistake," she said pleasantly. "I was told there were no women aboard except among the settlers." Anna Gregorovna's pale face grew paler and she looked swiftly again at me, but before I could

think what to say, she recovered herself and made her own answer.

"I am of the settlers," she said bitterly. "There has been no mistake." Marfa Alexandrovna looked at her in astonishment, and I could see that she was puzzled by the fact.

"But you are not a peasant," she said at once.

"Anna Gregorovna's father," I interposed, "was the physician of the party and a man of rank. It was a chance that they were rated with the rest." Marfa Alexandrovna's face cleared and she impulsively put out her hands.

"I knew it was a mistake," she said smilingly, "and I am glad that you have come. There have been scarcely enough girls in Archangelsk for company." They were the first kind words that had come to Anna Gregorovna in the new land, and her eyes filled with tears. The two girls clasped hands and stood for a moment in silence, while the blind boy, drawn nearer by the greeting, put out his hand and timidly touched Anna Gregorovna here and there about her gown. The guide, who till this moment had been silent, now added his word to the general explanation.

"Marfa Alexandrovna should also know," he said deferentially, "that this lady is the betrothed of the Lieutenant Sookin." His tone was grave and sufficiently weighted with respect, but there was a twinkle in his eye which belied his full sincerity. If he had thought to startle her by the information he gave, his ruse met with a measure of success. Marfa Alexandrovna stopped short in her greetings and drew back so she could look more clearly into Anna Gregorovna's eyes.

"Not Alexei?" she cried, and waited breathless for the answer. She found it without words in Anna Gregorovna's face and, controlling herself with an effort, spoke again with a return of her self-contained manner.

"Forgive me," she said with some confusion. "What Peter Nicolaievitch tells me is astonishing news. We have seen much of Alexei Yegorovitch in the past three years and he had never told us of your coming."

"He does not know of it himself," said Anna Gregorovna eagerly. "It was done suddenly, without time for tidings. I came because my father came and I could not let him know." Marfa Alexandrovna was now fully recovered in her poise, and, when she spoke again, was wholly at her ease.

"Well," she said, "at any rate I should not keep you standing here. You shall come with me and I will see that word is sent to the lieutenant." She took Anna Gregorovna again by the hand and would have led her away, but the child cried out against return and raised his voice in lamentation.

"Do not hold us back," said his sister, coaxingly. "The lady is coming with us and you shall come again when she is placed."

"But the man who spoke——" said the child with urgency. "If I am not presented I shall not know him when I meet him again." The girl looked at me pleadingly.

"Will you humour him? It is the shortest way." I came forward to where he stood.

"If you will tell me your name——" said the girl, blushing.

"I am called Fedor Kirilovitch Delarof," I answered.

"You hear, Paul," she continued. "Give Fedor Kirilovitch your hand." The child extended both hands and I took them in my own. He did not grasp them as another person would have done, but held fast with one hand while with the other he went fluttering over every inch of me within reach with a touch as light and delicate as a breath of wind. He gauged the length of my fingers and the thickness of the palms, and ended by gravely testing the cloth of my sleeve between his nimble finger and thumb.

"There, I shall know you now," he said with a sigh of satisfaction. "Your hands are larger than Marfa's. but they are just as soft." Then turning to his sister, he held out his hand.

"I am ready to go now," he said in his impersonal voice; and the two women, leading him between them, left us and went up toward the great entrance to the stockade.

We followed at a respectful distance, and, once inside the fence, turned from the great two-story structure standing at the front in which Baranof was housed, and skirted away toward a lower building at the right-hand angle which served as quarters for the men.

As we passed the mansion, two men came out of the doorway of it, and, pausing, stood in excited colloquy upon the steps. One of them was of good height and had the air of a person accustomed to command. The other was small and square in build, and nervous and excitable in gesture and speech. He was without a hat and the top of his head was bald above a fringe of sandy hair. The two were in heated dispute and gesticulated violently as they talked. The smaller man was evidently the aggressor. He pushed his opponent

hard and emphasized his charge by striking one hand with a sheaf of folded papers that he held in the other. Both saw us and stopped silently to look. Then the smaller man came down the steps and beckoned us to come to him.

"The commander," said Peter Nicolaievitch between his teeth, and took off his hat. I looked curiously at the man, for the short figure and sallow face were scarcely what I had expected to find in Baranof. But his eyes were as keen and masterful as a hawk's, and there was an abrupt directness in his way that spoke a shrewd ability in dominating men.

"You are Fedor Kirilovitch Delarof," he said with as much assurance as if he had known me for years. "I have letters here from Okhotsk concerning you." His voice was heavy and large for a man of his size. He spoke abruptly, though there was no unpleasant quality of tone.

The blood came painfully up into my face, for I had small doubt as to what account of me those letters must contain, and the more so that secretly I had hugged the hope that the governor would be content to let me begin again in this new place without the herald of his handicap. Alexander Andreievitch seemed not to expect me to reply, for without notice of my embarrassment, he went on:

"Peter Nicolaievitch, here, will see you settled in the barracks. The priest, I suppose, is a legacy that comes to me with the settlers. I desire him not to go to the archimandrite's house. He is to stay with you till I can talk with him. Get yourselves settled and come to me about four o'clock." He nodded distantly, and without further word turned again to his adversary

on the porch. Peter Nicolaievitch was evidently in awe of him, for he waited a full minute before replacing his hat.

"I should say," he chuckled, "that you are already in favour and will get on very well, but Baranof never did like a priest."

Inside, the barracks consisted of a long, low-raftered room with tables for our meals, and beyond this was a series of small chambers opening out of it on two sides. The walls were of logs and within had been squared to show an even surface; and all this surface had been coloured green. The ikon hung high on the wall that faced the entrance to the room. There were benches along the tables and here and there a stool. In one corner was the samovar, so crusted with white that it looked as if covered with snow. There was no attempt at decoration except that, in front of the holy picture, three coloured eggs hung suspended from the ceiling by slender strings and in one of the window embrasures some one had set up a bunch of dried grasses to collect the dust.

The pope and I were quartered together, and set ourselves to release our things. But before our guide had left us, and while he was still giving us parting advice, there came from somewhere in the house a call for him by name.

"Peter—Peter Nicolaievitch, are you come back?" It was a man's voice, high-pitched and youthful, but there was a slowness about the enunciation of the words that made the delivery of them seem an effort. Peter Nicolaievitch threw up his head and listened, and then looked at us and laughed.

"It is the Lieutenant Sookin," he said. "He cannot

get out of bed and I promised to bring him the news." Then raising his voice, he shouted, "All right, my boy, I'll be with you in a minute."

"Are there any new men come?"

"Yes, two for this place."

"Good," said the voice in a tone of satisfaction. "Bring them in. I want to see them." Peter Nicolaievitch turned to us appealingly.

"Can you take the time?" he said with the air of one asking a favour. "The boy is lonely, shut up in his room, and a new face is a Godsend in this empty land." I looked interrogatively at the pope, but he had already laid aside the things in his hands and risen for the going.

"Very well," I said. "We shall be glad to meet the Lieutenant Sookin." Peter Nicolaievitch was a man easily moved by his emotions. He got to his feet with an exuberant look of joy.

"He is a fine fellow," he said eagerly. "You will like him, if he is only a boy." He led us out into the main room and so to a chamber on the other side. The apartment itself was larger than ours and was cheerful with the afternoon sun that shone in through the uncurtained casements toward the west. It was fairly bare of furniture, the chief fittings being the two couches which occupied opposite corners of the room.

One of these beds was unoccupied, but the tumbled covers showed that the lack was only since the morning. In the other was a young man of perhaps twenty-two or three. He was slender and boyish in build and was propped up with cushions so that he sat, rather than reclined, upon the couch. His face was mobile and sensitive, with features refined almost to weakness, and he

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had luminous black eyes that devoured so steadily the objects they fixed themselves upon that one seemed to look right through them to the soul beyond.

He did not move as we came in except to lift his head and nod in welcome. But even this exertion worried him, for he breathed more quickly; and in each cheek, with the excitement, there began to burn a hectic spot.

"It was good of you to come," he said in his languid voice. Peter is company, but in these three years we have told each other most that is in our minds." He had the rare gift of laughter that draws one irresistibly into fellowship, and when he turned his head and smiled on Peter Nicolaievitch, I found myself involuntarily smiling with him. As for Peter, he shrugged his shoulders up in deprecation, and laughed outright.

"But I'm through with you now," he shouted. "The Commander has you where you can no longer shirk. He sends you these two men—one is a doctor and the other a priest—and you are to decide for yourself which way you will go. But that you shall go one way or the other, he has surely made up his mind and, well man or dead man, you will have no further need of me." The young man lay back on his pillows and half closed his eyes.

"Well," he said lazily, "if you should tell me more about them, I would be better able to make choice."

"The doctor's name is Fedor Kirilovitch Delarof, and the priest is called Joassaf Petrovitch." The lieutenant repeated the names softly to himself. "Joassaf Petrovitch," he went on, "is he to take the place of the archimandrite who is dead?"

"No," said the pope humbly, speaking for himself,

"I am only a priest, and not a monk. I shall be sent to one of the outer posts."

"Yes," said the young man under his breath, "Baranof believes in having the gospel seed so widely scattered that the sower cannot easily come back. You will probably range wide." Then his thoughts turned to me.

"I am glad," he said, "that there is to be a doctor at the post. Since the Malemutes killed Sergei Ivanovitch, I have had no medicine but brandy for this trouble in my throat. I will get you to look me over when you have more time."

I had no need to look him over to diagnose the case. It took no special skill to verify the trouble as being in the lungs. But I was puzzled to account for the absolute weakness of his present state. For while the terrible disease had surely set its mark upon him it was not yet far advanced, and he still had about him the warmth of manhood and the courage of life that serves to keep men young.

Peter Nicolaievitch had waited impatiently the delay of the introductions, and now could hold back no longer the information he was burning to impart.

"But the news, Alexei," he broke in, "you have not heard the news!" The young man scarcely changed his position though his eyelids drew down into a closer and more quizzical line.

"Don't disturb me, Peter," he said dryly. "I am making up my mind about my men." Peter understood his mood, for he chuckled to himself and winked at us as if we, too, were in the confidence.

"But Alexei," he said, "the news belongs especially to you." The lieutenant yawned as if the whole affair were but a bore to him.

"Well," he said, "if I must hear it, let it go." But Peter was in no haste to spring his climax while there was amusement in delay. He scratched his head and knitted his eyebrows as if weighing different matters vigorously in his mind.

"Where shall I begin?" he said as if to himself. "Well, for one thing, there are almost a hundred settlers in the batch."

"How many of them are for my company?" asked the lieutenant.

"Forty at the least."

"That means forty devils more for me to drill," said Alexei Yegorovitch plaintively, "and that same drilling is wearing work. But for all that, Peter, I am minded to throw in my lot with the doctor and stay alive." Peter rubbed his hands together in appreciation.

"Hold on," he said, "you are too soon. Wait till you hear the rest." He paused expectantly for question, but the sick man knew it was only a matter of time when the whole secret would come to him uncourted, and would not give him the satisfaction of demand. Peter was too full of the matter for long waiting, and after a short space of silence began to lead him on.

"Who else do you suppose was on the ship?"

"Anyone I know?"

"Yes."

"Man or woman?"

"Woman—someone you knew at home." The lieutenant let his eyes go entirely shut.

"How can I tell," he cried hopelessly. "There were so many of them!" But Peter kept him no longer in the dark.

"What if it were your betrothed whom you left behind in Russia?" he said impressively. Alexei Yegorovitch's eyes came wide open and with an effort he sat straight up in bed.

"Not Anna Gregorovna?" he said with incredulity.

"Yes, Anna Gregorovna," said Peter. "I talked with her myself." It had taken all the lieutenant's strength to bring himself up, and almost immediately he fell back. For some moments he lay turning over in his mind the astonishing bit of news, and even Peter respected his confusion. Twice he looked up at us quickly from under his half-closed lids and, catching our eyes, as suddenly looked down. The spots of red on his cheeks broadened and grew till he was flushed from neck to hair, and as the full import of the thing came over him, he laughed softly to himself.

"Where is she?" he said finally.

"At the great house." Again the lieutenant's eyes opened on Peter Nicolaievitch with an inquiring glance.

"And the other——" he said with some confusion, "does she know?" Peter Nicolaievitch in his delight got up and wrung the lieutenant's hand.

"That was the cream of the whole thing," he gasped. "She not only knows, but she has taken the lady in charge to keep her till you come. Alexei, you would have laughed yourself to see her face when she was told." But now, at least with the lieutenant, the statement did not make for mirth. Like a sudden sunset, the colour faded from his face. The excitement was too much for him and he fainted quietly away.

"How long has he been like this?" I asked as we laid him back and forced a stimulant between his lips.

"Oh, only since last night," said Peter cheerfully. "It is only when the bleeding comes in his throat that he gives out. He was the same way before. In a week he will be around as usual."

We fanned the patient and bathed his face, and shortly the colour warmed a little in his cheeks. His eyelids trembled and unclosed, and he looked up steadily into our eyes.

"Peter," he breathed rather than whispered. Peter Nicolaievitch leaned above him with all the tenderness of a woman.

"What is it, my boy?" he said soothingly. The lieutenant drew him toward him, and the ghost of his old smile hovered about his lips.

"Peter," he said pantingly, "I do not know—but after all—I had better choose the priest!"

CHAPTER VII

As THE hour approached for the interview with Baranof, I felt my courage ooze steadily away. Perhaps if there had been more weight upon my soul I should have been more composed. It is the innocent and not the guilty man who fears the law, in that he has so much more to lose. On the complaisance of the Commander hung not only my chance of livelihood, but also my hope of ordinary happiness in the daily round of life. My mind went back with bitterness to the governor of Okhotsk and the injury he had done me in setting Baranof to a false pre-judgment, by crying me here as wanton before there could come to me again the opportunity of retrieval by force of redeeming deed. Commendation in good quarters has not been lacking to me, either for energy or worth, and there had been no smirch upon me before this single thing. But a man may do forty shining deeds and get no credit, while as a matter of course the one scar on his knee will always be pointed out in the judgment of the sureness of his feet.

But face the climax I must, and I felt it would be foolish not to learn as much as possible beforehand of the man who was to pass upon my fate. To this end I set myself to question Peter Nicolaievitch, choosing the time when, having set myself to rights, I was alone with him in the great room outside.

"Baranof?" he said in answer to my question.

"Why, he is like the most of us, except that he has more power. He is a little hard if things are not done his way, but there is no particular blame in that. You or I, if we had his grip on affairs, would expect them to turn with our hand. He is a hard drinker and a good fighter and shrewd enough to outbargain a Yankee trader in his sleep. He holds down these devils of convicts here by the sheer force of his will, and that is the reason he stays here instead of at his home in Kadiak. The Lebedef settlement up the sound will bear watching, and he prefers to be close enough to do things for himself. He is sixty-four years old, but he likes a woman as well as he ever did, and the young ones do not always know just how to take his jokes. It is a funny thing," he continued with a chuckle, "but you will find him in the one thing as vain as a peacock—that his legs are so well preserved."

"But is he just in his judgments?" I asked. Peter Nicolaievitch screwed up his eyes and thought a moment before answering. Then he nodded vigorously.

"Yes," he said, "he is just in the main. But a better way to put it would be that he understands men and that they get from him about what they deserve. You can't fool him much about things—not at least when he is sober. But, man dear, when he is drunk you want to keep out of his way. The Lord himself couldn't hold him then."

"How will it be this afternoon?" I asked with some apprehension. Peter laughed aloud.

"Why, man," he said, "I believe you are afraid of him before you have come under his thumb. He won't hang you—there is too much need of a doctor for the

post—and besides he never gets drunk these days till after dark."

I thought over these things strenuously while we were passing from the quarters to the great house, and the more I considered the more my equanimity returned. The Commander, from the picture I had formed of him, was not a man to be over feared, and it has long been my custom in meeting with great personages to treat them as if they were human and had sympathies like my own. If one attempts no pose but shows himself exactly as he is, he will at least command respect for his sincerity.

So it was with curiosity, rather than uneasiness, that I noted the detail of the room which served Baranof as an antechamber, and I felt that I made my entry with satisfactory dignity and poise. The place was full of people of different walks in life, some evidently summoned to answer to a charge, some with business, and others come to show respect or ask some favour of the Commander. Baranof himself sat in a small apartment opening off of the main room, sufficiently removed to make his conversation private when he was so inclined, but at all times so placed that he could see what was going on outside.

He saw me almost as I came in, but beyond a slight nod of recognition paid no attention to me till it was my turn to go up to his desk. Even then he continued to search among his papers, and let me stand in front of him for near a minute before he gave sign that he knew that I was there. Then he motioned me silently to a chair, and I sat down and waited with some impatience for him to speak. Finally he seemed to find the document he wanted, for he stopped fumbling

with the rest and opening the paper ran it hurriedly through.

"Fedor Kirilovitch," he said without raising his eyes from the sheet, "what is your reason for coming here from Okhotsk?" Sooner or later, I had felt that this inquiry would have to come, and I was not altogether unprepared. If there had been no sinister herald of my coming, I should have made a clean breast of the matter when asked. But knowing that Baranof had been forewarned, it was not in me to give colour, just or unjust, to my case through overwagging of my tongue.

"You have had despatches," I said with dignity. "My self-respect would scarcely allow me to say more than has been told you there." Baranof's keen eyes came up suddenly from the paper to my face. Something in my answer had evidently startled him from his usual calm.

"What do you know," he asked gravely, tapping the letter with his finger as he spoke, "of what the governor has said of you in this?" I felt my face redden, and I hated myself and him that I should be confused.

"Nothing, of my own knowledge," I said bitterly, "but I can guess that from his own standpoint he has told the truth." Baranof breathed contentedly and settled himself again easily in his chair. When he looked at me again it was with a smile that shone in his eyes and wrinkled the corners of his mouth.

"How much," he said irrelevantly, "you are like your father when he was your age." It was an observation for which I was not prepared, and I waited in silence what he would say next. He came back to the subject without haste and his voice took on a softness that was almost kind.

"What if the governor has been merciful instead of just?" he asked, still looking at me with half-open eyes. "What if the charge against you is not so bad after all?" I could not but believe that he was playing with me in thus thrusting his hands among the strings of my pride, but so foolish a thing is hope that at his words, involuntarily, I felt it warm and kindle at my heart.

"It would be but fair," I said doggedly, "but before I give credit, I must know more surely what was said." Baranof laughed outright.

"And the father's spirit!" he said joyfully. "You shall read it for yourself." He took up the letter and turned it back so that only a portion of its contents could be seen.

"This is the part that concerns you," he said as he put it into my hand. I took the paper mechanically and turned it so that the light would allow it to be read. It was a close half sheet in the governor's precise hand, and though I was familiar with the script I found it slow and hard to read.

"As to the young man you asked for," it said, "I send him by this ship. When I tell you that he is Kiril Alexandrovitch's son, with all the markings of the breed, you will want no further pedigree. He is young yet, and has a boy's faults of impatience and hot head, which you in time, no doubt, will find the means to cool. But he does not know how to lie, and when he gives you his hand it is as certain as if he wrote the matter down. You can trust him as yourself, and he can tell you many things I would not care to write. He does not know that he bears a charge, and I trust you to correct with him the thought that I was harsh with him in the manner of his sending. But beyond

all this, Alexander, you will like him in that he is to-day what you and Kiril and I were when we had the world before us, and the spell had not fastened itself upon us which still keeps us blindly anchored to this devil's land. You, they tell me, have a daughter, and that must be much. But I am a lonely man, and this boy has stirred up in me wistful memories—so much so that I can never look at him without feeling that he has become to me what my own boy would have been if he had lived till now. And so—even if he does not appeal to you for his own sake—but he will—be good to him for Kiril's sake and mine."

I laid the letter back again and sat blinking confusedly at Baranof without a word. The message was so different from what I had expected that for the moment I was fairly dazed. It spoke with the kindly spirit I had always encountered in the governor before my last affair; and as I thought upon his fulsome praise of me, his assumption that with all my thirty years I was but yet a boy, and the garrulous tenderness of the old man, my eyes were full of tears. Baranof watched me with amusement in his face.

"Well," he said, "was he over-charitable or do you think he told the truth?" The words brought me back to myself with a rush, and I flushed to the roots of my hair.

"The governor is truly lavish with good words," I answered—"so lavish, indeed, that I find them hard to reconcile with the absence of them when we parted last."

"But he himself says they were not intended."

"True," I said, my anger rising as I thought of the heartsickness and bitter shame I had been made to

feel, "but what sanction had he for so flaunting me before them all and of pinning to me for all time such evil name?" Baranof made a gesture of impatience.

"You are younger than I thought," he said coldly, "or perhaps less nimble in your wits. Can you not see that sent out as an open servant of the Company you might be of less service to me than if you came discredited so that I could, if I chose, frown upon your living here at all?"

Then as I struggled to collect my thoughts it came to me what it all meant, and the reason for the ruse the governor had used. My heart was too sore to turn the matter with a jest, yet I could but admit to myself, as I considered it in my mind, that, the need of hiding granted, the thing had been both well and fairly done. And then, too, it is poor use to show anger and push blindly against a wall.

"I see it now," I said with such composure as remained to me. "It was a sacrifice that good might come. And, for this time, for the sake of the Company, I am to hold no wrath." Baranof straightened himself quickly and answered before the words had fairly left my mouth.

"Not only this, but every time," he said with earnestness. "It is the first lesson that is given you to learn. In this land, the Company is not a business only, to be put on and off at a whim. To you, to me, and every soul it touches, it is God himself, and there are no other gods before Him. It feeds the Indians and clothes and pays the whites, and there is no room under it for anything that does not yield obedience to its will. Look at the charter granting it, which fixes and

defines its powers. Shelikof, in our begetting, promised for us two things: we must be both law and gospel to the people we should find, and above all things we must extend the territory of the Czar. For this we are allowed to keep the skins we find as a reward—but of them, even, the Little Father gets his honest share. The obligation to go out and govern was at first a permission and a request, but it was a request that since by ukase has grown into a command. The pelts we take as they come, and their getting is the end. But with the lands it is a different thing, for after we get them we have to go on holding them with our lives. It was for this we were made the only power. If there is to be order, we must not only be agents of the Czar, but the Czar himself."

"But Lastockin claims——" I began; Baranof got to his feet with a roar and came round to my side of the desk.

"Damn Lastockin," he thundered in his heavy voice, "and Lebedef and every Russian of their greedy breed! While we were making the road, there was no man of them that dared to come. But now, because we have squeezed out an extra rouble in this place, every cowardly dog of them is licking the heels of the Czar for permission to come and scrape in our dirt for the kopeks we have missed. They are the curse of the land—they and the priests, and I am not sure which is the worse." He stood by the door as he spoke, his eyes roaming restlessly over the faces of the people waiting in the outer room. His glance rested on Joassaf Petrovitch where he sat, and he glowered at him with ill-concealed malevolence.

"What do you know of the priest who came with you

in the ship?" he asked, wheeling suddenly back so as to address me. "Is he meddlesome?"

"No," I answered, "he is absolutely a child when it comes to a question of affairs. Just now he believes that he has a mission to go out single-handed and wrestle with the heathen in the wilderness. But he could stay here a year and you would never hear of him either in comment or complaint—unless indeed he got the idea that you needed jogging in your own personal conscience."

"I wish I could believe it," he said with a sigh. "I would keep him in place of the archimandrite and ship the others back to Kadiak." The thought evidently took hold upon his mind, for he stood silent for some moments thinking, and idly tapping with his fingers on the desk.

"Well," he said finally and quite as if I had been urging the matter on him, "I will talk with him and see." He had the air of dismissing the subject and me together, and I rose to go.

"They tell me you are a doctor," he continued. "That will make it easy for you to find a place to fit yourself into, in the life of the post. There is much I want to talk to you about, but it will take more than one day to get it out. Go up stairs from the hallway, and in the room over this you will find the women of the house. They will console you for your troubles with me and give you a little tea. After dinner I will talk with you again."

I bowed and moved toward the door. As I reached it I turned to bow again; but Baranof was back at his desk with his head bent down over his papers, and a moment later I heard the sharp tap of his pen that called the next man to his side.

CHAPTER VIII

THE room above was not so large as the great anteroom, but for that reason it was more homelike and pleasant to be in. It was furnished as I had thought to find no house this side of the sea. The floor was warm with a carpet of soft red, the windows draped with curtains, and the walls hung with paintings of size—some portraits and the others counterfeits of the great and interesting things of life. There was an open hearth in which a fire blazed brightly, and at a near distance from it the women had established themselves with their tables and petty work.

There were three of them in the apartment, Anna Gregorovna, Marfa Alexandrovna, and a third, more elderly, whom I had never before seen. My entrance was so lightly made that they did not hear me come and I stopped a moment, just inside the door, till they should notice me. The elder woman saw me first and spoke softly to the others. Marfa Alexandrovna raised her head from her work and recognised me at once. She bowed pleasantly and, getting to her feet, waited expectantly for me to come to her. But Anna Gregorovna did not wait. Her work slipped to her feet, and with a cry she came skimming across the floor to me with both hands outstretched.

"Fedor Kirilovitch," she said impulsively, "it is good to see you again." I felt my pulse jump quickly at her touch. Though it was but a few hours since we

had left the ship, the time had been spent among strangers, and it came to me as a real pleasure once more to see her face. She herself was like a child in her enjoyment.

"I did not know what it was I missed," she said frankly, "and they have been very kind to me here. But everything has been new and strange around me, and now I know it was you, because you were the usual thing." She kept my hand and delayed me as I would have gone across to where the others stood.

"And have you seen Alexei?" she whispered, with a sidelong look at them as if she were ashamed that they should hear. "Is he then so very ill?"

"Yes," I answered, lowering my voice in acceptance of the confidence, "I have seen him and he is really ill. When the time serves, I will tell you about it."

She stood aside and we advanced together across the room. Marfa Alexandrovna also offered me her hand.

"Will you come and sit with us while we work, Fedor Kirilovitch?" she asked in her even voice. I thanked her and drew up the proffered chair from where it stood against the wall. As I did so, I felt a touch upon my arm and turned to find the blind boy at my side. I had not noticed him before, and he must have come in after my entrance into the room. As before, for a moment his fingers fluttered over my sleeve and down along my hand.

"You are Fedor Kirilovitch," he declared quietly. "I saw you this morning at the beach."

"That is true," I said, "and I am glad that you remember me, for we shall probably see each other many times from this day on." I took his hand and

would have drawn him close to me, but he pulled himself away and went across to a settle that stood by the table where his sister sat.

"I will sit in my own place," he announced in his high, unaccented voice, and climbing up, he settled himself with his hands in his lap, his head thrown back, and his whole sense alert to hear us when we talked.

There is a sense of discomfort that comes with the presence of the unfortunate who lack the full round of their powers—a discomfort that to me is something between awe and fear. I have only pity for them in my heart, but there is ever the uneasiness in being near them. But the sight of the little fellow sitting there in that helpless way stirred me to the routing of my repugnance, and the expression of the matter came involuntarily to my lips.

"Poor fellow!" I said almost under my breath. Low as the comment was, Marfa Alexandrovna heard me and held up a warning hand.

"Sh-h," she said in caution, speaking almost entirely with the lips. "Do not pity him. He has never known anything else." She smiled and shook her head as she spoke and I became silent, abashed at the carelessness of my mistake. And further it added little to my peace of mind to see that the old lady at her side was covertly but accurately looking me over from her place. Marfa Alexandrovna saw my embarrassment and was quick to help.

"You have not met Marya Andreievna," she said. "She is my aunt, my father's sister, and has been a full mother to me since my own mother died." She put out her hand and patted the old lady's sleeve as she spoke, and the latter took her eyes from me long enough

to look at her niece with quick understanding in her glance, and then let them come back again to me.

"This is Fedor," the girl continued, "son of Kiril Stefanovitch Delarof, whom you will remember as a friend." The old lady bent down her head to the left and looked at me sidewise like a bird. She was small and thin and had round black eyes like beads.

"Your father was a good man," she said with some conviction. "I danced with him when I was a girl." She shook her head with such vigour that her curls stirred animatedly on each side. Both girls laughed at her gentle positiveness, and Marfa Alexandrovna said:

"You will be glad that he has come. He is a doctor and can be of use to you." The old lady bestowed on me another searching glance.

"I have not had a day's illness for over fifteen years," she said with prompt decision, "and I have about as much use for a doctor as I would have for last year's snow."

"But what of your sick, mamochka?"

"There have none of them died," said the old lady dryly.

"But surely there are some with whom he could be of use," persisted the girl demurely. "There is Potap Burikof, for instance." Marya Andreievna looked from me to her and fairly shook with the vehemence of her scorn. I saw that, unwittingly, I had stumbled on a rival practitioner and that Marfa Alexandrovna in a spirit of mischief was amusing herself by playing on her pride of professional skill.

"Potap Burikof!" she burst out, "Potap Burikof! He has no sickness beyond the laziness that makes it

hard for his wife on cold mornings to get him off the stove!" Marfa Alexandrovna laughed out triumphantly.

"That is what I have been telling you all winter," she said, "but you know you have never been willing to admit it before."

The old lady glared at her in speechless disapproval. Then catching from her eyes and the demure pucker of her mouth that the girl had wilfully led her into wrath, she turned on her with unexpected energy and carried the war back into the enemy's ground.

"My poor, indeed!" she said with a sniff. "Why do you not put him to try his skill on something that belongs to you? I have no doubt that if you would ask him, he would put that pink and white lieutenant you are so fond of again upon his feet."

To me it was as if she had put a bomb-shell underneath our feet. There was an instant's pause in which no one spoke. The old lady felt that she had gone too far, and, looking timidly at her niece to see how she would take it, held her tongue. Having talked with the lieutenant, I felt that Marfa Alexandrovna's position was not an easy one. I glanced at Anna Gregorovna and was pleased to see that the thing came to her with no peculiar force.

But with Marfa Alexandrovna it was different. She did not raise her eyes from her work, but her face went fairly white and as quickly blossomed out with red. The colour flushed her ears and neck as well, and held there while she struggled to regain her calm. But it was the suddenness of the attack that caught her napping, and almost immediately she was on her guard. Raising her head she looked her aunt squarely in the eye,

though when she spoke there was still a shadow of unsteadiness in her voice.

"Fedor Kirilovitch is to live at the barracks," she said quietly, "and no doubt will find time to give the lieutenant the service that he needs." Then turning to Anna Gregorovna, she continued: "You have been wishing to hear from Alexei Yegorovitch. It is probable that Fedor Kirilovitch can tell you what you wish to know." Thus challenged, I looked at Anna Gregorovna, who at the words had dropped her work in her lap and sat with lips parted in breathless expectation.

"What I have to tell is neither good news nor bad," I answered. "The Lieutenant Sookin has come over the hill-top of his trouble for this time, and until there comes a recurrence of the bleeding he will be as well as he was before. There is no need of special skill for his advantage. He is still weak, but it is a case for woman's nursing, rather than surgeon's care." The old lady could not resist the chance to take another trick.

"There, Marfa," she said, "that is exactly what you said yesterday when you came back."

"We did take care of him," spoke up the blind boy suddenly, "but he was very sick." Anna Gregorovna looked at Marfa Alexandrovna in some surprise.

"Why, you would not go with me to-day," she said.

"No," returned the creole, her Indian stoicism of blood standing her in good stead. There being a doctor come, I thought it best to leave the case to him."

"But now he has spoken, surely it can be done." Marfa Alexandrovna's lip trembled and her composure began to give way.

"You must ask him, not me," she said with a pathetic attempt at a smile. But Anna Gregorovna was too absorbed in her desire, to note that in the manner of the other girl there was anything amiss. She got quickly to her feet and came over to me with all the excitement of a child.

"Fedor Kirilovitch," she said coaxingly, "you have done so much for me that I know you will not refuse me this." I looked down on her impatience with tolerant amusement.

"Joy seldom kills," I said smilingly, "and if you are sure you can be discreet in your expression, your going will help instead of harm."

"But when—when? Will you take me now?" I looked at Marfa Alexandrovna and it came to me that perhaps it would be a relief to her and save her the embarrassment of an impossible position, if I should undertake the thing as Anna Gregorovna wished.

"Yes," I said, "if the going will not be a discourtesy to our hosts." Marfa Alexandrovna rose to her feet and turned from us so that we could not see her face.

"There is an hour yet before dinner," she said with constraint, "if you think that will give you time." Anna Gregorovna waited no further sanction. Her eyes were radiant and her feet scarce seemed to touch the floor. She darted away like a bird, disappeared through a further door, and almost as instantly returned with a wrap which she wound round her shoulders and head.

"Come," she said, and took me by the hand. I bowed to the other women as we went. Marya Andreievna acknowledged the attention and courtesied

in kind, but Marfa Alexandrovna stood looking at the window and did not turn to see us go.

The distance was so short there was small time for talk, and indeed Anna Gregorovna was so intent on the coming meeting with her lover that she was beyond the thought of speech. Only, when I looked down at her, she smiled up again with a radiance that was a measure of the fullness of her content.

I have never cared for women, and it has been a matter of remark for me that men should desire one of them rather than another; but as I watched her face and thought of what we had been through together, and, further, of the happiness it was within her gift to give the man she loved, I felt a sudden pang down in my heart to think that through her such happiness would never come to me. I believe that I could have made her happy if fate had given me the chance.

"Wait here," I said, when we reached the living-room of the barracks, and she obediently sat down. Before permitting entry, I thought it best to see the sick man and prepare him for the coming. I had no liking for the report that my first patient at the post died promptly, even of joy, under my hand. Yet as I went in to this laggard lover, I felt a surly resentment stirring at my heart.

A man may change his mind about a woman and have none the less of my esteem, for there is no mystery deeper and more unfathomable than the mystery of choice. But when a man has given his hand in promise, it is a wrong and unmanly thing to draw it back, or even to press lightly, while the lady still gives up to him the full measure of her grasp. So it was a breeder of constraint in me that I should be called upon to lead the

woman deeper in and put the offending lover where he could further play the traitor to her trust.

I found him better for the afternoon's rest. He was sitting up in bed with the table drawn close to him so that he could the more easily reach his bottle and glass, and on the coverlid in front of him were spread, face up, the cards with which he had been playing some contest with himself.

"Well met, Fedor Kirilovitch," he called out gaily as I came in. "I have been playing against myself for the vodka and have won so often my head is like a balloon. Sit down, man, and I will beat you at anything you say." I came to him and, taking his wrist, felt carefully for his pulse. It was fairly regular, considering his weakened state, and I knew it could do him no harm to see the girl.

"I have brought you a visitor," I said with a smile. "That is if you are well enough to stand the strain of her visit." His eyes came up steadily to mine, and rested there, but I felt his pulse run quicker under my hand.

"Not Marfa?" he suggested wistfully, his lips almost parted into a smile.

"No, by God!" I answered sharply. "It is Anna Gregorovna, your betrothed." His eyes dropped and he remained silent, picking nervously at the coverlid while he thought the matter out.

"Yes, that is so," he said simply.

"Well," I said after a pause, "shall I bring her in?"

"Wait a moment," he pleaded, "I want to talk to you. Has Marfa told her?" By all the rules I should have hardened my heart against him and given no sympathy where so little was deserved. But the

assumption that I knew the facts and agreed with him upon them, together with his frank appeal to my judgment and willingness to reserve disapprobation, fairly took my breath away, and almost before I knew it, drew me to answer him in accordance with his desire.

"No," I said, "as far as I have seen, she has told nothing."

"Thank God," he said, "that makes it easier." Then after a moment's silence, "Fedor Kirilovitch, you are a man of the world. What would you do in a case like this?"

"It depends entirely upon you," I answered. "If the thing has passed for you, tell her so like a man."

"Oh, I couldn't do that," he said with a shiver. "Just think how far she has come!"

"Well, then," I said rather grimly, "as a gentleman, there is only one thing you can do. Drop the other one completely and keep your word with this one to the last amen." His face flushed with a sudden enthusiasm of determination.

"I'll do it," he said eagerly. "You will see. She shall never know." Then as suddenly his face fell and he sat silent, looking out into the room beyond me with vacant eyes.

"And Marfa?" he said softly, and there was a tenderness in his voice I had not caught before. "Poor Marfa!"

"Be decent, man," I growled, "if you are really going to give her up. Besides, she is a creole, and you could not legally marry her anyway, under the law."

"It would be legal here," he said absently, "and for that matter I do not care much anyway." I felt

my anger rising at his vacillation and brought him up with a sharp turn.

"Well, shall I bring this one in now?" He caught feebly at any straw that promised him delay.

"Wait until I get a drink of this," he said, and reached hastily for his glass, but before he could pour the liquor out there was a sound of knocking at the door. Alexei Yegorovitch paused with the bottle in his hand, his eyes fixed upon the spot from which the knocking came. The door opened slowly and the question solved itself with the appearance of Anna Gregorovna in the doorway. She had awaited the expected summons till her patience had vanished and then without hesitation had cut the Gordian knot. The lieutenant quailed visibly and set the glass swiftly back upon the table.

"Do not go," he said hurriedly. "It will be easier with another here. I will do it. You will see," he added in a whisper. I got to my feet with anger and distrust struggling madly together in my heart, and looked unsteadily at Anna Gregorovna. For full a moment she stood motionless in the doorway, and there was that of love and the glory of happiness in her eyes that any man might have been glad to see. Then she gave a little cry and came with a rush across the room.

"You brute!" I said under my breath.

"I know it," he assented meekly, "but it doesn't help the matter now." He let himself back against the cushions as if his weakness was too great to allow of other pose, but his face turned toward her with a light that was almost genuine, and, as she bent above him, his arm went as of right about her shoulders and he drew her down.

"My darling——" he said brokenly, and held her close.

My breath went out of my throat like a blast of wind, in witness of my disgust at his dissimulation. I knew that if I stayed longer I should strike him and spoil the pretty plot we had devised. So I got quickly to my feet, and muttering excuses which were wasted, for they neither saw nor heard me, I went hurriedly away.

In the outer room I found the pope with his arms on the table and his face drawn down, the picture of despair. He looked up as I came in and his expression changed to one of deep reproach.

"Fedor," he said, "why did you tell the Commander that I was an honest man?" In other seasons, the question would have stirred me to a smile, but I was too overwrought to find the humour in it now.

"Do not be a fool," I said harshly. "What would you have me tell him that you were?"

"That which would at least have left me where I was in his esteem; but now he likes me." I saw that my chance word of mediation had borne sudden fruit.

"Then you are to stay in Sitka?" I said, coming eagerly to his side.

"I knew that you were at the bottom of it," he said mournfully, waving me away. "No, I cannot stay in Sitka, though the offer was kindly made."

"But why? Why are you not satisfied with what is here?" He looked up at me almost pleadingly and I could see that it was a struggle with him to hold himself unmoved.

"Why do you tempt me?" he asked tremulously. "Has it come to it that you, Fedor, urge me to turn aside

from what I know to be right? I have told you my call was not to services like these." I am afraid that as I looked at him there, so shaken by the struggle he was going through, there weighed slightly with me for the moment the necessity for his mission and the consecration he put upon his work. I thought of him only as an old man, bent and broken, and yet the only creature in this whole strange world that was bound to me by the ties of voluntary love. I bent above him and put my arm about his narrow shoulders.

"Joassaf," I said, "I would not turn you wrongly from any bond of right, but have you thought what it will be to me to have you go away?" He did not speak or look back at me, but resolutely shook his head. I spoke to him again, but got no answer. So I talked to him as I would, entreating him to his advantage and urging both the mercy and the justice of the claim, while he listened on unwillingly, yet afraid to answer lest he should give way. How long we continued so I do not know, but while we remained with our arms around each other like two girls, the door of Alexei Yegorovitch's chamber opened and Anna Gregorovna came out into the room. I straightened myself hastily with a guilty feeling as if I had been doing an improper thing; but she paid no heed to our embarrassment and really did not seem to see.

"I am ready now, Fedor Kirilovitch," she said shyly. I looked earnestly at her to see how she had fared. Her face was flushed and on it were the signs of tears. But her eyes had still their expression of serene joy, and I knew that the tears had been tears of happiness and that Alexei Yegorovitch had been as good as his word. I bowed in answer and was

silent as to what I felt inside. But I had no mouth for talking and she no wish to interrupt her thoughts, so our progress back to the great house was made without a word.

CHAPTER IX

It is now ten days since we came to land, and Alexeï Yegorovitch is still in bed. It may be that his malady is more vital than it seemed and that he justly claims the privilege of rest. But if I were called upon to diagnose the case, I should say that his ailment was not so much of body as of mind. He eats with sufficient zest and his score for liquor is large enough for two. But he has lost the spontaneity of manner that was his early charm, and the smile with which he looked upon the world has given way to an almost pathetic gravity.

Anna Gregorovna comes to him each morning and makes the sunlight for him until noon. The afternoon she gives to the care of the blind boy, Paul, and is away from her lover for the time. Once or twice she has brought the boy with her to the barracks and so finished out the day, but for the most part her duties have taken her elsewhere.

As for Marfa Alexandrovna, she has not yet once set foot within the barracks since we came ashore. To what tender passages the relations between her and the lieutenant had already come, I can only guess. But granting their existence, it is plain to see the lady's pride has dragged itself to cover to conceal its pain, there to wait in silence the healing of the wound.

On the whole, the man has seen the worst of the affair, in that his sickness has taken from him the relief of work, and he can only lie and think and curse the

fortune that has so embroiled him. It was hard for him to believe that the creole now looks on him with different eyes, and for a week at least he watched and waited for her, with the air of one certain of her coming. But she has made no sign, and all in all her silence has so worn upon him that he looks but languidly on life.

With Anna Gregorovna, however, the matter has been different. Alexei Yegorovitch has been faithful to his word, and she has caught no hint of his defection. Her heart is light and her hope unchallenged, and the only cloud on her horizon is the shadow of ill-health that keeps the lieutenant in his bed. But even that shadow is no presentiment of real danger. She is impatient of it as a maiden might be, hindered of her wedding-day, but apparently it has never entered her mind that, through it, that wedding-day may never come to be.

A most curious portion of the matter is the mighty pleasure the thing has brought to me. Aside from the lieutenant, I am the only soul who can be said to have a claim upon the lady's past. The others count as strangers to her, but between us two the dangers and vigils of the ship remain a lasting bond of sympathy, and she turns to me for comfort and direction with all the innocence and frankness of a child. I do for her the petty services that would fall upon Alexei were he well. She looks to me to occupy agreeably her mind during the leisure evening hours, and Baranof has assigned to me the task of seeing that no harm comes to her or to the child in their outdoor rambles about the place.

To myself I may confess it that the obligation has been greatly to my taste. Not that it has added to my peace of mind. I am fond of the girl and like to have

her with me, and were she not formally betrothed to Alexei Yegorovitch, I can conceive that she might come to fill the entire place in my thought. But the recognition of the fact that she is fully promised has served to check such freedom between us as might look toward disloyalty to him; though, strangely enough, inside that boundary it has acted to render our intercourse most marvellously free.

Anna Gregorovna never forgets the bar that is between us, and trusting equally to my honesty that I will not forget it, grants me the freedom of intimacy that usually comes to men and women only with friendship of slower growth. And, so far, I have met her in good faith and have not overstepped the line. Only, not being wholly used to women, there are times when before acting I have to stop to think.

In cold truth, however, what reason is there on my part for the exercise of denial in the matter, except, perhaps, that it is pleasing to the lady that I should? Alexei Yegorovitch is no bosom friend that there should lie on me the charge to hold his honour as my own; and then, too, with the knowledge in my mind of his leaning toward Baranof's daughter, there is strong question in me of his right at all to union with his betrothed.

These reflections have lost nothing in their influence that Peter Nicolaievitch shares them equally with myself. From the first, I could not look with equanimity on the love passages between the sick man and the girl, and we were not three days along before I thoughtlessly let my feeling into words. We had caught from our own room the parting of the pair at the door of Alexei's apartment, and some show of fervour in him

that seemed a supererogation stirred me to condemnatory speech. Peter looked and listened, following the lover's doings with half-shut eyes.

"Don't be hard on him," he said coaxingly. "He likes her well enough, only he likes the other one, too. You would do about the same if you were in his place. He had not seen the first one for over three years, and that is a long time for a boy. It's lonely in this country, and with a girl to his hand like Marfa Alexandrovna, it is no wonder he forgot the look of the other and began to dream of the one that he could see."

"Still, a man has no right——" I began hotly, but Peter put up his hand.

"Man dear, what difference does the right make when you once get the idea that a woman loves you? There is only one thing then that seems worth doing, and that is to find out if it is true. Now in Marfa's case, Alexei has been finding out."

"Much good it has done him," I retorted scornfully. "He has had to come back to the first one in the end." Peter Nicolaievitch leaned forward and tapped me on the knee.

"There is where he is making his mistake," he said confidently. "He ought to marry Marfa and let the little lady go."

"But how, in honour, could he do it?"

"Honour be damned!" said Peter emphatically. "In a case like this it is kindest to do what is best." It grated on me somehow that he should compare Anna Gregorovna to her loss.

"Why," I objected, "is a marriage with Marfa Alexandrovna the only good?"

"For him?" he rejoined promptly. "Well, first,

because he thinks more of her than of the lady from across the sea; and then, because Marfa Alexandrovna is more suited to this country and will make him a better wife. It would give a mighty boost to his prospects, too, if the company had to think of him as her father's son. And lastly, my boy, I am fond of Marfa Alexandrovna and she is a good girl, and I should like to see her get what she wants."

"Which means that you would sacrifice the other one to her?" Peter turned and gazed at me with sudden speculation in his glance.

"Look here," he said, "why do you take such a tremendous interest in this case? What is it to you?"

The question was unexpected, and for the moment I failed to see my way to answering it out of hand. It is clear to me now that my interest was simply that of a man who saw injustice to a woman done. But in the suddenness of the interrogation the matter seemed to demand a reason more rigidly defined.

"I am not sure," I said with some hesitation, "that I have any interest in it at all." Peter's face beamed with a sudden illumination and he got eagerly to his feet.

"Why don't you?" he asked enthusiastically. "By the fish of Saint Mikhail, it is a great idea! What is to hinder your marrying Anna Gregorovna and letting Marfa Alexandrovna have the lieutenant if she likes?" There was a possible imputation in his words that sent the glow of irritation to my face, and a hot rejoinder trembled on my lips. I had only to look at Peter Nicolaievitch, however, to see that the idea was new to him and not an implication that had been lingering in his mind, and my anger cooled again as suddenly

as it had begun. He was like a child in his delight of having thought of it.

"It straightens everything," he repeated joyously. "Why didn't I think of it before?"

I tried in vain to argue with him that I was neither fit nor of a mind for such a venture, but he would have none of it. In ten minutes my part in the matter had grown from a pleasure to a personal duty; and in fifteen minutes, the duty was one that would admit of no delay. At length I abandoned the ground of personal convenience as an argument in resistance, and attacked him on the other side.

"How about the lady?" I asked with a smile. "She is to be reckoned with as well as myself."

"Man, it's a Providence!" he answered. "The Lord has delivered her into your hand. She is well used to you, if she isn't in love with you—and I'm not sure now but what she likes you as well as she does him. Why, if I had your chance of luck with her, I would go in and marry her myself." He was so in earnest in the matter that I laughed outright.

"If I could square myself with my conscience, Peter," I said, with assumed frankness, "I should like nothing better than to help you out."

"Then you will try?" he persisted eagerly.

"No, no, the conscience still works." His face fell in genuine disappointment.

"Well, think about it at least," he said persuasively, and added with an insinuating sigh of conviction, "It's a great idea!"

"All right," I answered, for it seemed best to make an end to the matter in the easiest way. "I'll think about it, if you like, but that is as far as it will go." His

spirits soared up at once to their former level of enthusiasm, and he rose and took up his hat.

"The Lord Himself couldn't help you more than I will," he said earnestly, "and I shall lose no time in getting to work."

"What are you going to do?" I asked hastily, for the fear was on me that he might be meditating action that was ill-advised. He stopped and looked at me with assumed reproach.

"My boy," he said with mock solemnity, "at the very least it is not good manners to ask Providence what it is going to do for you. But I do not mind confiding to you that I am about to go in to the sick man yonder to say that I have had a vision concerning him and that the Lord is going to let him see Marfa Alexandrovna before the sun goes down to-night." I looked at him in speechless amazement, and before I could recover myself he had bowed to me with exaggerated gravity, winked solemnly, and was gone.

It took some minutes' space to restore my equanimity, but in the end peace came to me with a smile. I had a premonition that Peter Nicolaievitch's prophecy would prove false, and time has borne me out in my opinion. It is now seven days since he assumed his rôle of autocratic divinity, and his best effort has so far failed to bend the unwilling lady to his wish. But even if he did, it would not change me in my decision not to coöperate with him in the plan.

He is right, of course, in that such conduct on my part would not be treason to a friend, but somehow the thought of the venture comes always to me with a vague feeling of distaste. I never was a hand to pursue a bird into another's field. Yet the idea has a certain

baleful fascination about it that brings it up at intervals in my mind, unconsciously, without my looking for it. And worst of all, from the time I talked with Peter Nicolaievitch I have not been able to look at Anna Gregorovna without being secretly conscious of the change.

"Why not?" it says, and sounds so loud in my ears that more than once I have found myself with my heart in my mouth, looking at her stealthily to see if she had heard. This humour has so grown upon me that to-day, when I came suddenly upon her in the open, my pulse stirred in a real panic of uneasiness, and I was fairly timid of approaching her.

The trees here, as elsewhere along this coast, grew thickly down to the very beach, except that immediately about the houses they had been cut away both for protection and for use as little fields. The blind boy was with her and they were halted at the edge of the meadow formed by a larger clearing beyond the southern gate. She had him by the hand and was urging him to touch the muzzle of one of the cows we had brought over with us in the ship—the first ones since the beginning that had so far been in this new land. The child was in a flutter of excitement at the experience, and now retreated and now advanced with hand outstretched in delicious apprehension.

"For shame, Paul, to be so fearful!" the girl urged mockingly, as he hung back on her grasp, but the child still hesitated.

"It breathes so hard, Anna," he pleaded earnestly, "it disturbs me." She saw me coming and turned with a smile.

"Here is Fedor Kirilovitch," she said with mock

reassurance. "Now you will not be afraid!" The boy stopped struggling and listened a moment for my approach; but his mind was too preoccupied with the matter in hand, and recovering himself almost instantly, he answered her with growing earnestness in his voice.

"I am not afraid, Anna," he said with an impatient stamp of his foot. "You cannot say that I am afraid. Only, the animal is new and I am not accustomed to it."

"Then why do you not put out your hand?" she persisted mischieviously. He turned to me with the outraged dignity of childhood and beckoned me to approach.

"I am not afraid, Fedor Kirilovitch. You know I am not afraid! Tell Anna Gregorovna it is only that I do not wish to do it alone. If others are going to touch the animal I will do so, too." I took his hand.

"Why do you tease the child," I said reproachfully. "It is all right, Paul, to be cautious with new things. Anna Gregorovna laughed at you because she thought you should believe her when she told you you would not come to harm." The girl's face flushed and she gave me a quick glance.

"I do not know where my heart was," she said softly. "I had no thought he would be disturbed." With a sudden access of tenderness she stooped and put her arms around the shoulders of the child. He received the caress passively except for a sudden uplifting of the face to her in recognition, and turned again to me.

"Take me up," he commanded, stretching out his arms. "I will touch the animal myself." I bent to him in turn, and Anna Gregorovna would have let him from her, but the blind boy clung to her as well.

"I want you, too," he declared. "We will touch the animal together." Anna Gregorovna resigned herself to the situation and kept her arm about him as I took him up. Thus fortified, his misgivings passed away, and he placed his hands according to direction on the creature's neck.

"It is true, Anna, as you told me," he said gravely. "There is no harm comes to one from the touching of this cow." He ran his active fingers up and down the animal's shoulder, alternately smoothing and ruffling up the hair, and added meditatively: "I believe that I should like her if she did not blow so with her nose." Anna Gregorovna looked up at me with a smile of understanding.

"I wish I really were the witch those people on the boat thought me," she said irrelevantly.

"Why?" I returned, though the meaning in her eyes was not hard to understand. She looked with significant wistfulness from me to the boy before she spoke.

"Oh, there are so many changes in things that I would like to make!" I had been following the movements of the child rather than listening to her talk, and her answer did not fix itself upon me definitely in words. But something in it must have stirred a sudden memory as I heard it, for, like a flash, I thought again of Peter and his heart's desire for me and for this girl, and along with it there came a pleasing consciousness of how near to me she stood.

She was so close that her garments brushed me from the shoulder to the knee, and the arm that was about the child rested lightly across my breast. With Peter's unhallowed prophecy in mind, I experienced a sensation that was new to me in thus being touched, and one which

stirred a feeling in me which it is still difficult to express. If I had a thought for the instant it was to prolong the delicious pleasure as widely as I could, and to that end I forced the impulse to speak naturally in answer lest she should guess the thought that was in my mind and take fright and draw away.

"What would you change?" I ventured absently. She looked again at the blind boy and her eyes filled with tears.

"For one thing, I would make windows in a tenement I know of, that would let in the light."

"Without prejudice, I could join you in that," I assented. Then as she showed no inclination to speak further, I went on: "And this accomplished, what would you do then?"

"It was the one thought that brought the wish," she answered readily, "but I can easily think of other things that I would like to do. For instance," she said with a flash of mischief in her eyes, "I would surely order it that when you arrived in a strange place you would find awaiting you the person and the greeting you once told me that you missed."

"In this land, at least, that requires no further necromancy," I said quietly. "I have found her, and it, without even the making of a wish." She flushed prettily at the compliment and half bowed her head.

"Thank you," she said, "but I meant one who would be to you all in all, and for all time."

"That," I answered promptly, "I am certain you would never be able to conjure for me with all your spells."

"Why not? You are surely not so conceited as to believe that such a thing could never be?"

"No," I answered, "it is a question of time rather than of conceit. Your ministrations would come too late." She looked up thoughtfully at me before she spoke.

"Too late?" she repeated with feminine curiosity. "Then after all she is already found?"

"Yes, found—and lost in the finding." She looked up again with her quick glance of sympathy.

"And you never told me!" she said softly.

"No, I have never told even her." No suspicion of my meaning seemed to dawn upon her, and she stood a moment considering the matter in silence with downcast eyes.

"Then she is dead?" she said at length, and her voice was almost a whisper.

"No," I answered, for a perverse spirit was upon me and I was determined to see the matter through. "But when I found the lady, she already belonged to another man." I strove to keep my voice at the usual steady pitch, but it is not unlikely it was lacking somewhere in control, or perhaps the words themselves were enough to sound a warning. Be it as it may, at the hearing, she turned on me with a startled look of inquiry and suspicion, and as she made up her mind I saw the colour rise slowly in her cheeks. Her arm slipped from about the child and she stood away from me with her hands drawn down behind her into the long folds of her skirt.

The blind boy perceiving that we no longer spoke to him, pushed out with his elbows as an intimation of desire, and I set him again upon the ground. My heart seemed in my throat, and under my calm I was cursing my stupidity in risking the good that had

already come to me on the perilous chance of achieving something more. But Peter Nicolaievitch's philosophy stuck in my head and I knew for a certainty that I should not be happy till I had found out really if Anna Gregorovna cared. She tried to keep her eyes on mine and there was a sudden new reserve in them that set me distinctly at a distance.

For the long run it is better to fight a thing out decisively and settle it once for all. So I steeled myself against the foolishness of softness and waited in silence what she would do. Only, I looked back so steadfastly into her eyes that in spite of her she had to let them down. She spoke again as soon as her composure gave her warrant.

"You were right in not telling her," she said as if there had been no pause, "for in that case the telling was something she ought not to hear."

For some reason, the reply came as a disappointment. What I had hoped for I do not know, but it was clearly not the thing that she had said. The spirit of retaliation began to stir wickedly within me and urged me on to speech.

"So long as I ask nothing in return," I said defiantly, "even if I had told her, there would have been no wrong." She shook her head involuntarily in negation.

"For you, perhaps," she said, "but not for her."

"No, for her too," I persisted doggedly. "A man's love is not a thing that brands a woman because she cannot take it up." Anna Gregorovna's face softened and took on a look of tremulous appeal. She made a sudden little movement forward and caught me with both hands about the arm.

"Do not talk to me like that, Fedor Kirilovitch,"

she said impetuously, the words falling over themselves in the hurry of her speech. "You must not talk to me like that. It disturbs me to hear it and makes me unhappy, and I know you would not want to do that." She shook my arm as she spoke to emphasise the appeal, and her whole figure stirred with the vehemence of her distress.

"The worst is done," I said gently. "You know the truth now, and there is nothing more to say."

"But why, when you ought not, did you say it at all?" she persisted, still shaking my arm. I put my hand on hers and held them still.

"To be honest," I said simply, "I had no thought of doing it when we began to talk, and I am not at all sure I knew the thing myself until to-day. Of a certainty you will hold me guiltless of any wish to give you pain, and as there is nothing sought from you as payment in return, it is not clear how the telling should disturb your peace." She shrugged her shoulders with a gesture of impatience.

"But I shall have to know it all my life," she said resentfully, and bent down her head so I could not see her face.

It pleased me that she should take the matter in this way. Though she was plainly moved by my confession and set upon her guard, her dissent showed no overflavour of distaste nor was she wroth with me beyond appeasement for so having spoken.

"Is it so shameful a thing that I should care?" I said a little bitterly. "Rather, after what we have been through together, to me it would seem a miracle if I did not." She did not answer and her head went farther down.

"Surely," I insisted, "you can tell me what you think." She raised her head but kept her face turned from me and looked around as if in question.

"Where is Paul?" she said with a show of anxiety. "By himself, I am afraid he will come to harm."

"Tell me," I demanded, "do you really care?" She made no answer and went on as if she had not heard.

"I do not see him anywhere," she said with earnestness, and moved as if to let me go.

"No," I said resolutely, holding her hands still fast upon my arm. "One way or the other, I will have an answer before I go." She looked up for an instant directly into my eyes and as quickly looked down again.

"How can I tell?" she said with a nervous little laugh. "I am not angry if that is what you mean; and—if there is no wrong in it—I like to be loved." With a sudden movement she drew away her hands and went quickly away from me along the path. I called after her but she paid no heed, and I remained standing where I was while she continued steadfastly in pursuit of the child, and in her searching never once looked back.

CHAPTER X

THE way along which Anna Gregorovna went passed by the angle of the stockade and dropped sharply downward toward the sea. As I accomplished the turn, I saw her half-way down the slope and beyond her the blind boy safely in the convoy of Marfa Alexandrovna and Joassaf Petrovitch, the pope. I quickened my steps and reached them almost as Anna Gregorovna joined the group. No element of unusualness seemed to attach with them to the fact that the blind boy had escaped from our control, and neither Anna Gregorovna nor myself felt it needful to bring the matter to their notice.

Joassaf Petrovitch carried a small basket and was evidently in attendance on the girl. They greeted us as we came up and we went together along the road. In the open sunlight anyone would have noticed the ten days' change that had come to Marfa Alexandrovna, both in carriage and in looks. When I first saw her on the sands her most marked characteristics were her quiet dignity and her air of being perfectly at peace with her surroundings and herself. Now, her figure was lacking in erectness, she was thinner and there was a pathetic hollowness about the eyes that told of a spirit ill at ease. But she held herself to seem alert in voice and animation, and laughed and talked as if to hide the fact that there was trouble for her in the world.

"Where is your steward, Fedor Kirilovitch," she asked with a smile, "that you have to come yourself for the distribution of the fish?"

"It is a larger fish than these that I am after, Marfa Alexandrovna," I answered. "Marya Andreievna has honoured me by at last taking my advice concerning Potap Burikof, who is suddenly more ill, and I am on my way to visit him."

"Is he then really sick?" she said soberly. "I had not heard of it."

"The affliction is sudden and only came this morning. His son, who went out with the others some weeks back, was caught in a drift when the ice went out, and was crushed. The news was brought in this morning, and the shock has prostrated both the old man and his wife."

"The poor creatures!" she said compassionately. "If the matter will wait till I have chosen my fish, I will go with you."

"It will wait, and I shall be glad if you will go. The boy of course is past healing, and the father's case is one that calls not so much for surgery as for sympathy and cheer." She turned to the priest and beckoned to him to be more quick.

"Come, Joassaf Petrovitch," she said. "Let us get through this business as quickly as we may." The priest had fallen into the usual reverie that comes to him when still. She watched him with amusement as he roused himself to do her bidding.

"Peter Nicolaievitch is away with the men at the river," she whispered mischievously, "so I have impressed Joassaf Petrovitch to carry my hamper and act as porter for the house." The priest's face beamed,

and he ambled in our rear with an air of perfect satisfaction.

"He does not seem greatly in need of sympathy," I ventured. "I should be happy if you made him so contented that he would not wish to go away."

"It is a strange thing," the girl said thoughtfully, "but he seems to have no pride. My father has gone further than he would with most men in urging him to take the archimandrite's place."

"Perhaps the matter would have been easier for him if he had been offered less. Now, he is disturbed not only by the belief that he has a mission to perform elsewhere, but also by the thought that he is not in orders and black frocked, and has no business in the place."

"Yes," she continued musingly. "It would be better if he were a monk. But it is different here from what it is in Russia, and if my father willed it, Joassaf Petrovitch could be archimandrite in spite of his white frock." She half paused and looked over her shoulder at the pope with an expression of real respect.

"Oh, it is a shame," she exclaimed. "He is the first priest with real saintliness we have had here for years."

"Be patient," I said soothingly, though I shared in her vexation. "Between us we will make him so comfortable and happy that he will surely bend to our desire."

We had reached the lower level and came to where the tables were set out. Those for the whites were farther up and held the larger and finer fish. Near the water the spreads became mere boards on sticks to

hold the portion the bounty of the Company dealt out to its Indian wards. The stewards of all the great houses were there and the Indians had already arranged themselves in a long double line. By custom, the distribution waited on the serving of the commandant's house, and at our approach a murmur of satisfaction went up from the crowd. Marfa Alexandrovna went directly to the highest table and spoke to the man in charge.

"You are late to-day with the giving, Mikail. It is already past noon."

"It was the tide, my lady," said the man deferentially, "and the wind at sunrise that blew the boats far out. It is only within the hour that they were able to beat in." He straightened the fish upon the table with a conscious air of pride. "They are before you," he continued, "if you will be pleased to choose." The girl looked them over critically and with evident pleasure in the work.

"My father was especially pleased with the new sort you sent us yesterday," she said without lifting her eyes from the task. "I told him particularly of the trouble you took in the selection."

The gratified official bowed with a pleased humility, but at the same time his manner plainly carried the impression that the praise received had been no other than his due. He dived excitedly into a basket under the table and emerged with a great fish half as long as himself.

"Another surprise for you, Marfa Alexandrovna," he said triumphantly as he laid it on the slab. The girl gave a little, astonished cry.

"A sturgeon!" she said delightedly. "Where did you get it so early in the year?"

"It was taken this morning in the river where they were mending the traps. Peter Nicolaievitch had it sent at once."

"It was thoughtful of him," said the creole, "and Alexander Andreievitch will be pleased. Send it to the house, and when you yourself return I will see to it that they set out for you a proper glass." The man bowed thankfully.

"I shall find the green wine good for the pledging of your health," he said, and laid by the fish.

Marfa Alexandrovna chose from the table the further provender she needed and turned to receive her basket from the pope. But in the interval he had wandered quite away and I saw him standing at a table at a distance where the natives were supplied.

"He is still true to his call," I said with some amusement. "He has left you to go to the people of his choice."

The distance was too great for easy hail, and for that matter there was so great a noise of talking in the place that a call stood no fair chance of being heard. So I made my way to where the pope stood, carrying my message myself as the quickest means of getting speech with him.

As I came to him I saw that it was not idle interest alone that held him to the spot. He stood by the side of the dispenser of fish and was watching with absorbed interest the process of distribution. There was a well-meant effort at equality in the giving out, in that the fish was cut and thrown into a rude scale for weighing, the law of the Company giving to each beneficiary an equal amount.

But difficulty had come in the division, and a crowd

of excited natives were gathered around the officer in charge. Immediately in front of him was a man whose arms and body moved in fierce gesticulation and whose voice was raised above the common din in continuous and high-pitched cries. In each hand he held up portions of the fish that had been assigned him and waved them wildly in the butcher's face.

"What is the matter here?" I demanded, as I took the pope lightly by the arm. He looked around at me, but without giving up his place.

"The man has not been treated fairly," he said with a calm air of judgment. "He has not received that which was his right." The fish butcher heard and turned upon him with a sneer.

"What do you know about it?" he said with an ugly show of teeth. "The man has his full weight like the rest." The pope's face flushed, but he answered without haste.

"Yes, the count is full, but only half of it is fit for food. You have given him two heads." The native must have understood some Russian, for at the mention he renewed his clamour and lifted up again his fish. The piece in one hand was firm flesh of back and sides, but had the head attached. That in the other hand was but a head from which hung down the useless entrails as they had been dragged out from the fish. For all his noise, the butcher paid no more attention to the man than if he had been a fly. What apology he vouchsafed was directed wholly to the pope.

"Some one has to take the heads," he said with a deprecatory shrug.

"Yes," returned the pope, "but if you had not cut for the young woman who came before him a piece

entirely without waste, he would not have had to take two." The butcher shrugged his shoulders again and made to pass the thing off as a joke.

"Oh, the man is old," he said with a grin. "He does not need so much to keep him fat as the girl does. And besides, if he is not satisfied, and there is any left, he can come again at the end." The pope stuck bravely to his guns.

"But why," he said sharply, "should he wait until the end to get that which it is his right to receive now?" The butcher's patience was exhausted, and, seizing a fish from the table by the tail, he swung it around and brought it with convincing force on the head of the man who had complained.

"Clear out!" he shouted, "and let the others get their fish." The crowd scattered and the complainant forwent his grievance and skipped nimbly out of reach. Emboldened by his success, the butcher next turned on Joassaf Petrovitch, who, throughout, had quietly held his ground.

"You, too," he bawled vindictively, "or I'll show you something that is stronger than religion to make men move!" He stepped out from behind his table and came toward us with the evident intention of visiting bodily punishment on the priest. The latter faced him without show of fear.

"Strike me," he said sternly, "but in either case I shall make complaint——"

"Complaint!" echoed an authoritative voice behind us. "Who is it says complaint?"

At the first sound, the belligerency of the butcher's manner vanished to the winds. He fled back round his table as quickly as he had come, and without a further

look in our direction industriously began again the interrupted dissection of his fish.

I turned to see the cause of his retreat and found Baranof himself immediately behind us. He stood with his feet wide apart and hands forced down so hard into the pockets of his jacket that his shoulders were pushed up. His head was thrust far forward and almost touched his breast. The corners of his lips were drawn grimly down, and his half-closed eyes fixed themselves searchingly on the pope as if demanding answer to his question. He lurched slightly now and then, and it was plain to be seen that he had been drinking more than was good for his self-control.

"Meddling, eh?" he went on with a sneer. "By God, one priest is as bad as the rest! Well," he demanded insolently, still continuing to address himself directly to the pope, "have you found a scandal fit for report?"

The old man turned his serene face slowly toward the questioner with no sign beyond a trace of colour to show he was excited or annoyed.

"I have found no scandal, Alexander Andreievitch," he said mildly. "I was simply reasoning with this man because he was unjust." Baranof disengaged one hand from his pocket long enough to beckon to the butcher to leave his work and come.

"What is this, Yakov?" he demanded sternly. "Have you changed the weights?" The man took off his hat and bowed before him. Then he answered, lying so glibly that no one not an observer of the facts could have told his statement from the truth.

"Your highness can see for himself," he began unctuously, "that to the weight of a scale the measure

is still the same. It is this new priest who would change the rule and weigh out fish without head or fin."

"No," interposed the pope, "it was this man who weighed more heads than one to a single man." The man was not slow to catch that Baranof's irritation ran to the priest, not to him.

"Your highness will understand," he said with deferential insinuation, "that what I did was wholly by the established rule. It may be that in this case the share was not altogether of the best; but having given it, what could I do? If I had received it back on the man's complaint, every brown beast in the line would have found his fault with me when it came his turn, and where would discipline be then? The priest is new," he added with a magnanimous air of explanation. "He does not know the need, or he would not have interfered." Baranof did not speak, so I knew the plea had weighed with him. He grunted ungraciously and turned his suspicious eyes again slowly on the pope.

"The man is right," he said coldly. "There must be no argument with a native about the lots." Joassaf Petrovitch made no reply, but stood listening with his air of placid patience and waited what the commander would do next. His meekness angered Baranof more than loud-mouthed protest would have done.

"Speak up, man," he said with growing irritation. "When you are wrong, why don't you own it honestly. You were quick enough before." The pope, thus goaded, courageously stood his ground.

"I was not in the wrong," he said with quiet dignity. "You have misjudged the case because you do not know the facts."

Baranof's hands came out of his pockets with a jerk, and I thought he was about to lay violent hands upon the pope, but he thought better of the matter and stood working his fingers with a growing spark of anger shining in his eyes.

"There it is," he said as if to himself. "I said they were all alike—and I thought of giving him the archimandrite's place!" Even the pope's saintliness was not proof against insinuation such as this.

"At least," he retorted sharply, "you will admit that I never sought the place?" Baranof waved the question from him with a gesture of absolute disdain.

"Don't talk with me," he said with maudlin dignity; and then again in a louder tone, "Don't talk to me, I say! Yesterday you were archimandrite; but to-day you could not have the place if you were the only priest this side of heaven!" The pope caught at his meaning as if it had been good news.

"Then I am at liberty to go away?" he demanded eagerly.

"Liberty!" said Baranof. "Liberty! You are going to go whether you want to or not!" The order was intended as a rebuke, but to Joassaf Petrovitch it was like a reprieve after sentence of death.

"When may I start?" he demanded with an excitement that was ill-suppressed. Baranof mistook his eagerness for bravado or contempt. His frown darkened and he shook his open hand in the other's face.

"To-day, by God!" he gasped, "if it be possible—and by the bidarka to-morrow morning, if it is not!" The pope's face was radiant with the look I had come to know as inspiration, and he bent his head.

"I am well content," he said simply, "and I shall surely go." He stepped backward as if to bow himself away, but he was not to escape yet. Marfa Alexandrovna had come in time to hear the last words spoken, and touching him on the arm, she stayed him where he stood.

"What is this, Joassaf Petrovitch?" she asked eagerly. "Has my father then given his consent?" The pope was too happy in having gained his point to remain ill-tempered with the world. He looked at Baranof and at me and then back again at Marfa Alexandrovna.

"He has not only given his permission, but he insists upon the matter," he said with a whimsical twinkle in his eye. The girl looked from him to her father in puzzled inquiry. A glance at the condition of the latter sufficed for understanding, and her face flushed with her embarrassment.

"I am very sorry," she said in a low voice. "Are you to go alone?"

"Yes."

"It is suicide!" she exclaimed with conviction. "But I will do what I can to help you. I will see that you have an interpreter." The pope's eyes filled with tears.

"You are good to me," he said. "God bless you!" and slipped quietly away. I was too full of the matter to let him go without having my own say to him about it, and hurrying, I ranged myself alongside of him as he walked.

"Well, you have done it!" I said contemptuously, and stopped because I could not trust myself to further speech. The pope turned his face in my direction, but the spell of his inspiration was upon him, and it was

almost as if he did not see. I do not think that he heard what I said at all, for when he spoke it was simply to let out the thought that had possession of his mind.

"Do you hear, Fedor?" he cried exultantly. "The ban is lifted and I am free to go."

"Have you no spirit?" I exclaimed, "that you let this man browbeat you and send you out from the settlement like a whipped dog?" He shook his head in firm conviction.

"It was more than his will," he said with certainty. "He was but the instrument to work the matter out. I know now more clearly than before that it is God's hand that is moving me to go." The hopelessness of arguing with him struck me with full force and I gave up the unequal fight. But down in my heart the opinion lay and grew that it was another hand than God's that pushed him on.

CHAPTER XI

THE house of Potap Burikof was the farthest Russian habitation to the south from the stockade. The walk thither from the fish-market was not short, but Marfa Alexandrovna and I made the most of it without the passing of a word. With both of us the thought was with the pope, and my feeling, at least, was not of the sort to be confined to silent wording in the brain.

I saw that Marfa Alexandrovna was possessed not alone by her disappointment in his going, but also by a bitter sense of shame at her father's unwarranted display of spleen. She was too proud to admit the fact by look or word, nor did I speak of it; but the knowledge was between us and kept me from setting my own protest into words. The heart was heavy with each of us, and it was sympathy rather than comfort that went in with us through the door of the hut.

The place was a low log structure of two rooms and within, though bare, was scrupulously clean. The windows were curtained with some bright-coloured cloth, and the brass about the ikon shone with a brightness that betokened patient work.

Marfa Alexandrovna opened the door without knocking, as if accustomed to the place. The floor along one side of the room was raised as in the Indian huts, and near the centre of the platform thus made, on a mattress without covers, was an elderly woman

lying on her face. She was dressed all but her feet, which were bare, and her head rested on her crossed arms as a pillow. Marfa Alexandrovna spoke to her, and, with a start, the woman swung herself up till she sat on the edge of the platform, regarding us with confused and questioning looks.

She was a gaunt creature, tall and narrow of chest, and her eyes had the sunken dulness of expression that comes from grieving that is too strong for tears. She made a shy, deprecatory movement as if in explanation and struggled palpably to regain her self-control.

"You will not notice," she said presently, and pulled down her dress so that it would hide her feet. "I had been out for mushrooms—he is fond of them—and the grass was wet and I was tired when I came in." She pointed to the table where the vegetables lay in the uneven heap that had rolled from her basket, and at the same time cast an uneasy glance from us to where her stockings were drying on top of the copper urn. Marfa Alexandrovna went over to her and sat down by her side.

"Liza," she said gently, "I have just been told. Is it true then that it is so bad about Ignatiy?" The old woman's lips quivered, but she did not change her attitude or raise her eyes.

"Yes, it is true," she said apathetically, and her voice was colourless in the intensity of her feeling. Marfa's arms went around her and drew her close.

"Oh, how can you bear it?" she cried impulsively. The woman's body yielded stiffly to the embrace, but she showed no pleasure in it and her hands remained tightly clasped in her lap.

"I am used to it," she said simply. "It is just one

thing more!" The girl clung to her with strong feminine sympathy.

"Oh, it is hard!" she exclaimed tremulously. The woman sat as stiffly as before, looking straight ahead with her fierce, dry eyes.

"Do not worry about me, panna," she said wearily. "It is for him that I am afraid." Marfa Alexandrovna drew back, made a motion as if to cross herself, and looked at her with startled inquiry.

"For whom?" she asked.

"For Potap."

"Oh," rejoined the creole, with a gesture of relief. "Where is he?"

"Yonder," said the woman, nodding toward the other room. "Since the news came, he has not spoken, but only sits and cries."

"Take us to him," said the girl soothingly. "Fedor Kirilovitch is a doctor and perhaps he can be of use." The woman made no objection, though she displayed no interest in the plan. Reaching behind her to the wall, she drew from under the mattress a pair of knit shoes into which she mechanically drew her feet, and rising, she went in silence to the door of the other room, leaving us to come after her or not as might seem to us best. I looked inquiringly at the creole, and she nodded her head in assent.

"Come," she said softly, "we must do what we can." With that, we followed after our guide, but before we had passed the door she had turned back and met us again.

"Wait," she said, "he is asleep," and we stopped and stood looking by her into the narrow room. The man we had come to see sat in a chair by the window

on the farther side. He was a giant in frame and had the rare perfection of figure that is so often found among the peasants of our race. His hair and beard were snowy, and, although he was asleep, his face and bearing had so much of dignity and benignance in them that involuntarily I thought how like he was to the pictures of God the Father that the painters make. I looked significantly at Marfa Alexandrovna and she returned the glance with one of honest admiration.

"Is he not beautiful?" she said under her breath. The woman heard her and gave the first sign of interest I had seen her display.

"You should have seen him when he was young," she said wistfully. "He was no Jew to wait to be handsome till his beard became white." Marfa Alexandrovna saw her opportunity to say a comforting word.

"And you have had him all these years," she said softly. The woman's face relapsed again to its apathy and she leaned against the wall.

"I know," she said. "He has been very good to me." Then with a lingering fear that we should think her unthankful for the blessings that had come, she added: "It will be better when I have slept—if I could only sleep!"

"Has it then been so long?" I asked.

"Since the tidings came. It is two nights and a day." Marfa looked at me in quick appeal.

"You can give her something, can you not?" she whispered.

"Yes," I said, "if you will keep her quiet till it has time to take effect."

"I will do that," she answered confidently. Then

turning to the woman she said: "Liza, Fedor Kirilovitch is going to give you a sleeping potion so that you can get your proper rest. But when he does, you must lie down and let me take care of you till you go to sleep." The woman vouchsafed the same passive attention to these words that she had given to what had gone before, and seemed ready to consent. But the old care remained active in her mind, for when the thing was mixed and brought to her, she shook her head and pushed it steadily away.

"No, no," she said, "I must not drink it. There is no one to care for Potap, and the mosquitoes are fierce and will disturb him in his sleep."

"Drink it," I urged. "I will look after Potap."

"There was a native boy," she said, looking vaguely here and there as if in search of him, "but I sent him to the post. You will surely stay till he comes?"

"Yes, Marfa Alexandrovna will stay with you and I will not stir from your husband's side."

"Give me the cup," she said quietly, and drained the potion to the dregs. Marfa Alexandrovna persuaded her to lie down upon the bed and loosened her clothing and covered her as if for the night; but not before she had seen me go through to the other room and take my station by the man who slept.

There was small interest to the mind in the task that had thus come to me. The man, tired out with his long bout with grief, slept quietly along, and the only occupation to my hand was to wield my brush as occasion came, and between times watch the women in the room outside.

Marfa Alexandrovna had settled herself on the platform by Liza Burikof's side, and was adding to the

potency of the sleep-giving draught by gently and continuously stroking her head and face. The poor creature could not wholly be still though she strenuously tried, but tossed and tumbled restlessly from one position to another and continually moaned and sighed. Finally she could stand it no longer, and rising up, caught the hand that was stroking her in both of hers.

"Oh dearie, dearie!" she said with a sob, "what shall I do?" Marfa Alexandrovna yielded to the mood and bent above her.

"Do nothing, Liza," she said soothingly. "Try to bear with it and soon you will be asleep." The old woman shook her head so that she threw back her hair.

"It is not that," she groaned. "If that were all, it would not be so hard. But after the sleep—the long days and the years—oh, what am I going to do?" Her face set convulsively with the intensity of her grief and she made as if she would have risen to her feet. Marfa Alexandrovna put her hands on her shoulders and gently pushed her back.

"No, Liza," she said with an air of authority, "you must lie down in the bed." Without resistance, the woman allowed herself to be pushed back, and Marfa Alexandrovna threw her arm across her body to keep her in her place.

"You must be patient, Liza," she said with her grave voice. "All these years you have worked hard and the working has helped you when you did not have to think. There will still be work for you in the years to come if you will but look for it."

"But for whom?" burst out the woman bitterly. "Before, there was serving and caring for my own.

But now Potap will not eat and I cannot see to sew, and Ignatiy is buried out there somewhere in the moss and will never come in again by the door to give me heart!"

She was silent again for a time, and I guessed from her regular breathing and quiet pose that the draught was beginning to have its effect. Then again she suddenly opened her eyes and lay staring up into Marfa Alexandrovna's face.

"I have had three men to love," she began in her monotonous voice. "Two are dead and one is near death, and I fear God means me to outlive them all. He might have left me one!" she added plaintively. She lapsed again into silence and was still so long that I thought she surely must be asleep. Then in the quiet she began disconnectedly to talk again.

"Three men!" she said. "Three men!—and Ignatiy was so young! Why, it seems only yesterday that he was scratching my breasts with his little hands. You, panna, have never had a man of your own and cannot understand. It is trouble and care to live with them and they are not always kind. But it is all one when you love them, and the forgiving is as sweet as the rest. It is the loving them that counts. Oh, panna, if it ever comes to you to have one and he is bad to you, forgive him everything, but do not let him go!"

Her voice had sunk lower and lower as she went on, and the words had become more indistinct and slow, and this time when she stopped, nothing came to break the silence, and I knew she was asleep.

After a sufficient time Marfa Alexandrovna raised her arm from the woman's shoulders and quietly drew away. She did not rise, but remained seated on the

edge of the low platform, staring fixedly into vacancy, with her hands resting idly in her lap. I do not think that she remembered me or anything about her, so absorbing was her thought. She sat thus for some moments, and I was careful not to make a noise. Then her head drooped and her hands went up to her face and her shoulders began to ouiver with an abandonment of sobbing.

I was ashamed thus to look at her in the nakedness of her grieving, for I shrewdly guessed that it was her own sorrow rather than Liza Burikof's that was finding its vent in tears. A woman has no stronger argument for enlisting sympathy than weeping, and at the first drops I felt my heart grow treacherously weak. At that moment if I could have given her the lover she desired, I would have thrown my scruples to the winds and set myself wholesouled to do as Peter Nicolaievitch wished. God knows the doing would have brought small strain upon my will. To have Anna Gregorovna for my own was a happiness so great I scarcely dared to think it might come true. But down in my heart I knew I had the wish, and recognised guiltily that if I countenanced it I could not shoulder the responsibility for it off on Peter Nicolaievitch's plan, but would be doing only what my own heart impelled.

The thing so entirely filled my mind and revolved so variously in my thought as to how it might be best brought about that I was ready to welcome anything that would seem to further it; and so it was with a feeling of satisfaction as well as surprise that I saw the outer door swing slowly open and Alexei Yegorovitch appear behind it on the sill.

I could see by his look that the meeting was a surprise

to him, and that he had not expected to find Marfa Alexandrovna there. But now that he did see her, much as I knew he had wished for the meeting, some instinct of delicacy held him back from intruding suddenly on her in the abandon of her grief, and he waited hesitatingly on the threshold while his resolution grew.

"Marfa," he said finally, and his voice was as pleading as a girl's—"Marfa, may I come in?"

At the first sound the girl sprang to her feet as if in sudden fear. She looked quickly from side to side as if seeking some avenue of escape, but in the end thought better of it and defiantly stood her ground. She did not answer him, however, but stood dumbly, with her head drawn proudly up, and I saw her shoulders begin to rise and fall with the deepness of her breathing.

The lieutenant gathered courage from her silence and slowly ventured in. He never took his eyes from her face, but came steadily across to where she stood, and when he reached her, his hands went out in a sudden gesture of appeal. She shrank back as if the simple contact with him were defilement.

"Do not touch me," she cried with a scorn that was almost horror in her voice. "Was it not plain enough I did not want to see you that you must take it upon you to follow me here?" The lieutenant winced as if she had dealt him a body blow. His face flushed and his hands dropped mechanically to his sides.

"I did not follow you, Marfa," he said humbly. "I did not know that you were here. The Indian boy brought word that help was needed; Peter Nicolaievitch was away and it was my duty as next in command to come." The soft answer failed of its proverbial effect, for Marfa Alexandrovna remained stubbornly

in the same attitude without replying and turned away her face. The lieutenant kept his distance and tried to wait patiently what she would do. In the end his eagerness mastered him and he essayed the thing again.

"Will you not speak to me, Marfa?" he ventured, and it was plain to see that his whole heart hung upon his words. The girl steadied herself with an effort and made shift to reply.

"What is the use?" she said without looking up. "It is all over, Alexei. There is nothing now to say."

"At least," he said, "there is the use that I am entitled to be heard, if only that you may not think me so utterly a knave."

"It makes no difference now," said the girl wearily, "and, if you please, I would rather not."

"No," he insisted, "you shall listen to me. I have not been playing with you all these months. I was honest in it from the bottom of my heart. Cannot you understand that you are dearer to me than anything else on earth?" Marfa Alexandrovna gave him a hasty glance and lifted a warning hand.

"It is all over, Alexei," she repeated with quiet earnestness, and there was a ring of conviction in the utterance that was a death-blow to his hopes. He refused to accept it as such, however, and went doggedly on: "It is true that Anna Gregorovna and I were betrothed in Kargopol and there would seem to be no way in honour to explain the fact. But she was only a child when it occurred and I little more than such. I took it with so little seriousness that in the months that followed my coming here I never once stirred myself to hear from her, nor did she write to me. And—

then I met you. You were a woman, not a child, and I learned the difference that there could be. I do not believe that even you doubt that in that time I really loved you; and I could not rest till I had seen you again and told you that, in the same old way, I love you now." The girl's face relaxed nothing of its hardness and she looked at him with involuntary scorn.

"And so," she said, "you are going to marry Anna Gregorovna?" Alexei Yegorovitch caught his breath with what was palpably a sob.

"Oh, how can you?" he said brokenly. Then gathering himself with a dignity that sat well upon him, he went on: "You might have known that it was a matter of honour with me, not of heart. She believed in me and made the journey friendless and alone to come to me. You yourself would not have me do less."

The girl did not answer, but he must have seen some sign of relenting in her that was not vouchsafed to me, for with a sudden movement he was at her side and I saw that he had her by the hand.

"Marfa," he pleaded, "you did love me if you do not now. Why will you make it harder for me by thinking so badly of me because I am trying to do what is right?" She was still silent and kept her face from him, but she did not withdraw her hand.

"Will you forgive me, Marfa?" he asked again. The unwonted talking had its effect on Liza Burikof and she stirred uneasily in her sleep. Marfa Alexandrovna gently withdrew her hand from the grasp of the lieutenant and went on tiptoe to her side. She cautiously patted the covers here and there and arranged them carefully about the woman's face, and with the return

of silence she relapsed again to perfect rest. But this accomplished, the creole did not return to where she had been before but remained bent above the bed, nervously fingering the clothes and stirring herself busily with a pretence of occupation.

Alexei Yegorovitch stood and waited, gazing silently at the floor. He looked up once or twice to see if she were coming; and finally, noting that the woman had again become quiet, went softly across to where Marfa Alexandrovna stood. She was still busy with her pretended labour, and as he came behind her his arm went caressingly around her shoulders and his head bent till it was almost touching hers.

"O Marfa," he ejaculated softly, and for the first time there was a ring of hope in his voice. "You will forgive me, will you not?" Even yet she did not respond to his persuasion but remained with her face hidden from him as before; only, her figure stiffened at his touch and her hands stopped picking at the cover and lay limply on the bed.

It was only for a moment and I can but guess at the bitterness of the struggle that went on in her mind. But a man's arm is a strong persuader when there is hunger at the heart, and no doubt that the words that Liza Burikof had spoken lingered pregnant in her thought. Be that as it may, the indecision ended, she lifted up a face that was flushed and wet with tears.

"How can I help it?" she said as if to herself, and let him turn her toward him till her eyes looked into his and she stood with her breast against his breast.

He was more shaken in his victory than he had been in defeat and clung to her less like a lover than a child. She accepted his weakness as a natural thing and

soothed him as simply as a mother might. How far he would have pushed his vantage I shall never know; for while they stood, there came the sound of voices and a cautious rapping at the door.

The couple sprang apart and Marfa Alexandrovna sought with hurried fingers to repair the disorder of her hair. She sat down on the platform by Liza Burikof and motioned to Alexei Yegorovitch to answer to the knock. He obeyed and gave admittance to the Indian boy and two women of the post. I saw there was no further need for me and resolved to slip away without recalling my presence to the girl. Hastily gathering my belongings, I switched the insects for the last time from the face of Potap Burikof, and unlatching the rear door, slipped quietly outside.

CHAPTER XII

It was pleasant in the open after the closeness of the little room. The heat of afternoon was beginning to abate, and the sun was so low that the shadows lay like long fingers pointing to the hills. I took off my hat and carried it in my hand for coolness, and out of the quietude of the life around me sought to resolve my mind's disorder into peace. The experience of the day had tired me. There is a strain in sympathy that wears on one like work, and no man's strength is proof against it.

And then, too, Peter Nicolaievitch's plan hung always like a weight around my neck and I could think of no one with whom I could take counsel in deciding on the part which I should take in it. The thing went as an undercurrent continually with me as I walked, and like a panorama there came up before me every detail of the encounter between Alexei Yegorovitch and Marfa Alexandrovna.

But if I were to single out the thing that spoke most strongly to me in those recollections and which stayed most clearly in my mind, it would be the insistence of Alexei Yegorovitch on the fact that his betrothal to Anna Gregorovna was but a childish affair and scarcely of the heart. It was a satisfaction, somehow, to have it relegated to such time, especially as the explanation served clearly as a justification of the fact that she had fixed her choice at all on such a man.

I thought of other things, of course, and had them on my mind, but again and again I found myself coming back to this fact with growing satisfaction; and when I reached the barracks and pulled myself together to go in, as a last word of the day's adventure, it came back to me again, and I said to myself under my breath as I went up the steps: "I am glad that she was so young."

Inside the barracks there was anything but peace. In our own room the pope was gathering his belongings for the going, and Peter Nicolaievitch lay in wait for me by the outer door to bid me to a gathering at the great house that night.

"It is the commander's order," he said, "and all the post is bidden. There is a bidàrshik here from Yakutat or somewhere in the North, and the commander thinks to astonish him with the importance of the post." He was still cleaning himself after the labour of the day, and as he spoke he rubbed vigorously with a cloth his hair and face, and dried his ears with a brisk manipulation of the hand.

"Where is Alexei?" he asked suddenly.

"Somewhere outside," I answered vaguely, for I had no thought to tell Peter Nicolaievitch the happenings of the day. "I last saw him in the neighbourhood of the south gate."

"I wish he were home," he said, with a solicitude that was fairly parental. "It is almost night and he ought not to be out after the air grows chill." He returned to his ablutions and I went across to my room.

The pope looked up at me absently from his packing, but his mind was full of other things, and he vouch-

safed no stated form of greeting. There was yet ample time for the preparation for the function of the evening, and I determined to wait, since it was convenient, till the things that strewed the floor were cleared away. So I lighted my pipe, sat idly down upon the bed, and watched the pope as he moved in and out among them.

It was a curious lot of stuff, if a full list were made. Of the things for his own use, the number was noticeably few. The bulk of the litter that filled the floor was furniture for church service, robes for the sacrament, a bell for ringing in the wilderness, and a stock of simple remedies for the healing of the sick.

There was a heap by itself, made up of bright-coloured cloths, cheap ornaments, and women's stockings and shoes. I picked up one of these last and turned it in my hand. It was small and well made and had high and dainty red heels.

"What are you going to do with these, Joassaf," I asked curiously. The old man looked up warily at me to see if I was in earnest or in jest. There was a shyness in his manner born of the uncertainty as he answered: "It is a concession to the weakness of womankind. I thought perhaps to win some native creature with it where other argument would be in vain." Peter Nicolaievitch, who had completed his toilet, came into the room in time to hear both question and reply.

"You do not need it, father," he broke in dryly. "In this country the native women run after one so, the trouble is not to get them, but to get away. Curiosity is their cardinal sin, and religion or love it makes no difference, they're hot for it as long as it comes with the proper thrill. But by the beard of St. Basil," he

said suddenly, checking the oath with a laugh, "let me see that shoe!" He took it in his hand and turned it critically from side to side.

"Did you ever see a native woman's foot?" he asked finally. The priest, with a self-conscious look, guiltily shook his head.

"I thought not," said Peter Nicolaievitch with a chuckle. "Why, man dear, there isn't a native in America could get it on her foot. They are born with bigger feet than that!" He remained looking at the shoe with sentimental interest, thrusting his fingers into the toe and smoothing the polished top with his open palm.

"The virgin in the church where I was born had shoes with red heels like that," he said reminiscently, "and I remember that the first time I saw a girl with them on, I thought she surely must have stepped down from a frame. But later I found out that that was about as far as her similarity to the holy lady went. It was a girl with red shoes that started me on my journey here. I kissed her in the passage without stopping to look, and her father opened the door. In the trouble that followed he got hurt, and I thought it was healthier to come away." He tossed the shoe back into the heap, stretched himself with both arms and legs, sighed deeply, and turned to me.

"It's a queer world, Fedor Kirilovitch," he said soberly, "and you may see a queer side of it to-night. The commander has been drinking all day with the bidàrshik and is as liable to murder him as to drink with him, before the night is through." Then a flash of recollection came to him and he moved mysteriously to my side.

"I came near forgetting what I came for," he said in a low voice. "Alexei is here. He has seen the lady, and the matter is all right." I was startled from my calm, for I had no means of knowing what had happened after I had left Potap Burikof's house.

"Then she will marry him?" I asked excitedly. Peter Nicolaievitch laughed ironically and patted me soothingly on the arm.

"Oh no, man!" he said. "Give them time. But she has forgiven him his sins and wiped out the past, and if they are left together it cannot help but come out as you wish."

I did not like the assumption that the plan was mine. Yet there was satisfaction in the news and secretly I knew that I was glad. I am not superstitious, but following the matter back, the conviction steadily grew upon me that it was a thing ordained of fate. At any rate, there was an inevitableness about the movement of it that was keenly suggestive of that force.

The speculation occupied me while I made my toilet for the evening show, and lingered with me during the protracted dinner hour. It was only when I stepped from the darkness into the light and noise of Baranof's well-filled rooms that I was able to shake off the domination and hold myself at peace.

The gathering was something worth while to see in that sparsely settled land. Baranof must have had strong need to impress the officer from the upper post, for he had gathered in well-nigh all the people of the place. The women were not so many; but the men were decked out in all the bravery of apparel that could be mustered in the post. The women kept to the upper end of the room, but near the door there were

tables set out with pipes and tobacco, and at these the bolder spirits were already playing cards. The greatest freedom prevailed, and the laughter and the talking made a steady murmur in the place. Peter Nicolaievitch and I came in together, and he stood beside me as we looked around.

"Yonder is the commander," he said, nodding toward the little room which, on the day of my first interview with him, had been Baranof's private place. I looked as he directed and saw that this alcove had been cleared of the desk so as to give room for the function it now served. Only a small table had been left in the middle of the floor, and at this sat Baranof and a stranger whom I had never before seen. There was a row of bottles between them and they were drinking from the large glasses commonly used for tea.

They were evidently well along in the orgy begun at noon, and the bidàrshik was leaning with his elbows on the table, singing some sort of song. He held up his glass and slowly beat the measure backward and forward. Baranof slouched in his chair with drunken gravity, and with the pompous dignity of intoxication followed the rhythm with slow movements of his head.

"Did Alexei come?" I asked irrelevantly.

"Of course," said Peter with some surprise. "You will find him up there with the women, I suspect. Suppose we get up nearer and see which one of his chains galls him the most." We picked our way slowly among the tables, Peter stopping to banter nearly every one he met. Twice we were halted to pledge healths in the tea the attendants continually served, and it was plain to see that Peter was popular with the men of the command.

"Marfa has more than her share," he whispered, as we reached the end—"both of the youngsters who came with the bidàrshik and as much of Alexei as he dares to give."

The girls sat some distance apart from the others, with Marya Andreievna between them to give them confidence. The old lady was not troubled with admirers and sedately sipped her tea. Marfa had half a dozen men around her who kept her busy with their questioning and talk. There was a trace of colour in her cheeks and a new light in her eyes, and her spirits were evidently exuberantly high.

Anna Gregorovna was more alone and sat with her back to the crowded room. Alexei Yegorovitch stood behind her and bent above her as he talked. I guessed that he had chosen this point of vantage so that without suspicion he might be out of Anna Gregorovna's line of vision and yet keep always in his eye the face and figure of the girl he loved. Marfa saw us from afar and gave us greeting.

"Here is Peter Nicolaievitch," she cried gaily. "I have my thanks to make to you for the great fish you sent. They tell me that you captured it at the peril of your life." A shout of approval went up from the group of men immediately about her, and it was evident that Peter's fishing had been the subject of delighted comment with them and that the story had not lacked for interest from the way in which it had been told.

Peter Nicolaievitch fell at once into the conversation, standing in defence of his reputation with his customary volubility, and I passed on to where Anna Gregorovna sat. As I came to Marya Andreievna she bowed to me gravely, stopped drinking her tea,

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and eyed me sidewise over her cup as if expecting me to speak.

"I saw your patient, Burikof," I said as I went by. "It has been a great shock for the old people, but I think they will safely come through." She considered the information for a moment with arrested head.

"Grief does kill sometimes," she said, almost as if she had hopes, and began again sipping her tea.

Up to this time I had not thought of myself as delaying or avoiding a meeting with Anna Gregorovna, but now that I was near her I felt a hesitancy in bringing it about. It was the first time I had seen her since our interview of the afternoon, and I feared lest with the meeting should come embarrassment. There was no avoiding the essay, however, and I trust I went up to her without disclosing what was in my mind. She greeted me gravely and without constraint, but for an instant she looked up with an inquiry in her eyes that was almost an appeal. Her effort was to meet me with the same candour as before, but behind the assumption I could not but feel a difference in kind.

"I am glad to see you, Fedor Kirilovitch," she said, giving me her hand. "Alexei has been doing his best but he is not well yet, and his wits seem to be the last thing to mend." She looked up laughingly at him as she spoke, and he glanced at me in pretended deprecation.

"Anna Gregorovna is a witch," he answered with an attempt at lightness, "and gifted to read the mind. Isn't it uncanny to think that she knows all the time what you are thinking inside?"

"I have seen Anna Gregorovna at the weaving of her spells," I answered with what grace I could, "and

I have full respect for her power. But I would rather her esteem for me came from what she reads and thinks for herself than from what my mouth is able to say." The girl blushed at the answer and Alexei softly clapped his hands.

"Good!" he said, "Good! I did not think you had it in you. I can trust her with you for a time. You are sure you will not be bored?" he added, bending to Anna Gregorovna with a pretence of anxiety in his voice. She gave him a little push of impatience.

"Go," she said. "We shall not even miss you while you are away." He laughed and drifted in the direction of the group that clustered around Marfa Alexandrovna. I drew up a chair and beckoned to a servant to bring me a glass of tea. Anna Gregorovna's eyes still followed the lieutenant, though her attention was ostensibly given to me.

"What a dear fellow he is," she said almost wistfully. "It is so good to see him on his feet again." I too was watching Alexei Yegorovitch and made no answer to her remark, for just as he reached Marfa Alexandrovna the creole's attention was attracted by something outside of her immediate surroundings and she did not see or speak to him at all. Her pose was one of uneasy interest. Bolt upright, with her head erect and still, she was gazing intently at what was going on beyond her in the room. Her lips were slightly parted and unconsciously, as she looked, she moistened the upper one with her tongue.

I followed the direction of her eyes and saw that Baranof and the bidàrshik had tired of their seclusion and had come out into the room. They were arm in arm and, in the free hand, each carried a bottle of wine,

They were lurching slowly down the apartment, flourishing their bottles and inviting everybody to drink of the liquor they contained.

The crowd rose to them with a shout and gathered round them, lifting up the glasses in which they had been drinking tea. The whole place was affected and for a moment, at our end of the hall, we were left practically alone. When I looked back, Marfa Alexandrovna had risen to her feet.

"I think I shall go in," she said, with some embarrassment, and looked around to where the other members of her household sat. Marya Andreievna rose promptly from her place and came to where Marfa Alexandrovna stood, but Anna Gregorovna was intent upon the scene before her and did not seem to hear.

I thought I understood the creole's sudden move in that it was not in reason that a woman could stand by unashamed while her father thus played the fool, and further, there was that in her face which stirred me with an undefined sense of fear. She waited a moment and then spoke again:

"Anna Gregorovna, will you not come with us? We are going up." The girl laughed reassuringly and shook her head.

"Oh no," she said, "not now. It is all new to me and I would rather stay. I will come in a little while." Marfa Alexandrovna was so seriously disturbed that I went across to where she stood.

"Is it really best that she should go?" I asked under my breath. She stood silent a moment with compressed lips; she was her father's daughter, and it came hard to her pride to criticise him even for the accomplishment of this good.

"It may be," she said slowly, and kept her eyes from my face. I went again to Anna Gregorovna's side.

"You had better go," I said quietly. "It would not be pleasant after they are gone." Some perverse spirit seemed to be possessing her and would not let her stir.

"There are other women here," she said coolly. "Why should I not stay?" The uneasiness grew within me and for the moment I lost my head.

"You must go," I said with a foolish assumption of authority. "It is not safe for you to stay." She laughed softly and looked up at me with half-closed eyes.

"Perhaps," she said defiantly, "but you forget that I have Alexei here to-night and so am not afraid." The slur that lurked in her rebuke was needless and I was keenly stung by its unkindness. She herself was a little frightened after she had said it and looked with guilty eyes to see how I took it.

"Very well," I said with as much dignity as I could muster. "I have no more to say," and I dropped back so as to leave her to herself. But I stayed near enough at hand to have an eye upon her and to be of ready help to her in case there should be need. Marfa Alexandrovna and her aunt had seized their opportunity and disappeared, and Alexei Yegorovitch came back to Anna's side.

The uproar in the room grew louder, for as soon as the bottles which the two dispensers held grew empty, they called for more and went on pouring out the wine. So long as they stayed in that portion of the hall there was no pressing danger. There was noise and singing and a shadow of coarse talk, but the thing was a drink-

ing bout pure and simple and no worse than I had witnessed many times before.

But novelty even in such matters is the sting that gives the zest, and as Baranof and his companion skirted round the fringes of the revelers near the centre of the hall, his eyes wandered in our direction and he grasped joyously the new idea.

"The women!" he said, looking reproachfully at the bidàrshik, "they have had nothing yet!" He dropped his companion's arm and catching a glass from the table reeled unsteadily to where the nearest woman stood.

She was palpably afraid of him and shrank back; but the awe in which she held him as commander of the post prevented her from carrying out her evident wish to run away. He bowed to her with exaggerated politeness, poured from the bottle into the glass, and tendered her the wine. She took it with some hesitation and raised it to her lips. When it was drunk, she handed back the glass and made a courtesy of thanks. But she was not to escape so easily, for Baranof caught her boldly around the waist and kissed her audibly on either cheek. Then turning to the bidàrshik, as if it had been a show, he signified that the chance was his as well.

The man was not slow in using his advantage and added an extra touch to his salute by kissing the woman fairly on the mouth. She struggled and pushed back from him, her face as red as the kerchief around her neck, and faring free, made haste to hide herself among the crowd. By this time Baranof had found another victim, and was carrying out his programme as before. Those around fell into the spirit of the thing and

followed on, applauding freely each new conquest added to his list.

Some of the women took it philosophically and submitted in patient silence to the rough embrace, but others screamed and fought as their strength permitted; and one indignant girl, to the joy of the lookers-on, gave the bidàrshik so resounding a slap upon the face that he blinked and gasped and was well-nigh sobered for the time. The men to whom the women belonged looked on in surly silence, but so strong was the fear of the commander when he was in his cups that no one of them dared to interfere, but looked on helplessly in bitterness and shame at the insults to their womenkind.

Anna Gregorovna at the first gazed on the scene with keen enjoyment, but as the fooling became more boisterous she became more grave and when the two old reprobates began their service to her sex I saw her look uneasily around and finally speak to Alexei Yegorovitch with an evident mind to go. But before she reached decision, her opportunity had passed. The only way by which escape was possible lay through the door well down the other side, and the roistering crowd already covered it.

Alexei Yegorovitch got her to her feet, and screening her as much as might be, edged quietly around the crowd, hoping to shun notice in the mad confusion and so win safety into haven unaddressed. I joined them as they passed and stationed myself on the girl's other side. She did not speak, but gave me a quick look of repentant gratitude as I came.

For a time the plan seemed likely of success, for we made in safety the great part of the way; but just as

I made sure, there was a swift upheaval in the crowd, it opened suddenly in our direction and a woman, stronger or more obdurate than the rest, broke from Baranof's embrace and fled wildly by us through the open door.

Balked of his prey, Baranof stood in surly silence looking keenly here and there in search of some other victim on whom to lay his hand. He was stooped and panting with the stress of his exertions, and his eyes shone with the fire of excitement that was like the look of the insane. He knew us on the instant, and with the cunning of the drunkard fathomed at once the thing we were about.

"Not yet!" he said, stepping quickly between us and the door. "Oh no, not yet!" and began pouring out the liquor from his bottle to the glass. Anna Gregorovna watched him as if fascinated but said not a word. Only, when the glass was filled and the commander, raising it, paused to look over its brim at her with his sneering smile, she began to tremble violently, and I saw her hand reach slowly out behind her and grope about for mine. I caught it firmly and my heart gave a great leap up, for I recognised that consciously or unconsciously it was to me, and not to Alexei Yegorovitch, that she had turned in her need.

The lieutenant's mind worked faster than mine and he stepped briskly forward between the commander and the girl.

"Give it to me, Alexander Andreievitch," he cried with his infectious laugh. "I have not had a drop from you to-night." Baranof looked at him suspiciously for a moment, then with drunken gravity waved him ponderously away.

"Ladies first," he said sternly. "Stand aside!"

The lieutenant persisted in his interference and tried to take the cup, and Baranof lost at once his self-control.

"Stand aside!" he thundered in his big voice. "Am I not to be master even in my own house?" He made a sweeping swing with the arm that held the bottle and Alexei Yegorovitch went staggering backward into the crowd. The men in it were silent and had gathered round us to see what would come next. The wine in the glass was mostly spilled, but there was enough left for the commander's purpose in carrying out his will. He came close to Anna Gregorovna with the same evil smile.

"Panna," he said, with exaggerated deference, "you will drink to mine and the Company's health?" She looked back at me inquiringly and clung tighter to my hand.

"Drink it," I whispered, "it is the easiest way." She took the glass mechanically, made formal thanks and, swallowing with difficulty, drank the small measure of liquid it contained. I could see the purpose growing in Baranof to take her as he had taken the others in his arms, so, as she finished, I leaned forward and laid my hand upon his shoulder.

"Do not touch her," I said in a low voice, but distinctly enough for him to hear. "I give you fair warning now." He glared at me in speechless amazement, and the light in his eyes blazed brighter as his irritation grew.

"How long since you became commander here?" he demanded with a sneer. "I will have no distinctions between people; and this woman shall be treated like the rest. And mark you," he added, shaking his finger at me to give malevolent emphasis to his words,

"if you so much as raise a finger to prevent it, I'll have you whipped so sure as I have you in my hand!" He made a quick movement forward and would have caught Anna Gregorovna by the waist, but she was alert and avoided him by a sudden change of place, and before he could recover himself I struck him fairly between the eyes and he went sprawling backward on the floor.

There was a gasp of astonishment from the crowd that was like the deep intaking of a breath, and there was not a face that did not look at me with more or less of fear. Baranof lay for a second as if stunned, then he turned himself slowly over and got clumsily to his feet. I improved the interval to speak to Alexei Yegorovitch.

"Get her away," I said hurriedly. "I will stay and see the matter out." Anna Gregorovna looked at me piteously and seemed inclined to wait, but the lieutenant gave her no time to think, and before the commander regained his feet I saw them pass to safety through the door.

I turned again to Alexander Andreievitch, expecting nothing but that he would come at me with a rush, but the blow had sobered him to a point this side discretion and he kept outside the limit of my arm.

"Peter Nicolaievitch," he called with the promptness of a military command, "detail a file of men to take this man in charge. I said if he interfered he should be whipped, and I will be as good as my word. See that he has ten lashes at daylight to-morrow morning and afterward report to me." There was an ugly swelling growing on his forehead where the blow had come and he felt of it tenderly as he spoke. When he was done,

he turned on his heel, and walking unsteadily passed from sight into the inner room. Peter Nicolaievitch remained behind, and his face was a study as he came up to me.

"What shall I do?" he asked helplessly, and his eyes were fairly full of tears.

"It is not your fault," I said comfortingly. "You will need no guard. I will go with you without the use of force."

I linked my arm in his and started with him down the hall. The crowd stood back respectfully as we passed and made no comment, even of a word. They were cowed by the show of authority and the swiftness with which the punishment had come; but I myself was not so much cast down, for I still felt in mine the touch of Anna Gregorovna's hand and knew that, whatever came to me, she would understand.

CHAPTER XIII

THEY say that when men come to die it is the onlookers, not the passing souls, that fear and suffer pangs. Yet, by the same measure, it goes current that when a man stops short of death, but comes to open shame, he himself is unsparing in self-accusation, while that his friends are strong to minimise the wrong and pass the matter by. But this to me is not a sound philosophy. Not all men die with comfort in their souls, and here, in my own case, where shame had surely come, I do nôt think I found myself so grieved or fearful as did the friends and intimates around me.

There was not much said on either side, and I am sure I made no open lamentation. But there was a depression in the air of them that fixed the status of the thing at serious gravity, and listening to their talk I began to feel much as I imagine a dead man must who is being dressed and straightened by his friends against his burial.

Peter Nicolaievitch walked up and down the room in anxious self-communion, and when a particular phase of recollection proved too much for him, he swore beneath his breath. The pope said not a word, but sat beside me with his hand on mine and listened to our council with an air of such distress that, had I not already felt my own misfortune, his look would quite have made me sorry for myself.

There had been no talk of confinement, nor any show

of force. When Peter Nicolaievitch and I left the great house, we had taken our way to the barracks as naturally as if it had been a simple going home. We both knew there could be no full escape for a prisoner in this land, for, granted he fared free, there was no place except through journey on the sea where he could find a seasonable and proper sanctuary. Beyond the settlement all was wilderness and desolation, and a man would need before him the knowledge of a keener punishment than mine to make him choose the venture as a fair alternative.

So we sat in my room in the accustomed way and I at least harboured a sense of growing anger with the needless foolishness of it all. We were scarcely in the house when Alexei Yegorovitch came. As quickly as might be, he had escorted Anna Gregorovna to a place of safety and hastened blithely back to lend a hand at the final resolving of the fray; but the hall was cleared and Baranof was gone, and only stopping to learn the outcome of the clash, he had followed us straightway home. He was still keyed to the enthusiasm of the fight he had not had, and his talk was caustic and belligerent.

"It was fine!" he said joyously, as he wrung me by the hand. "I should have struck him myself if you had not been so quick. And the lump on his face, Peter! Did you see the lump?" Peter Nicolaievitch growled an inarticulate assent that took some time to settle into words.

"But the salve for it, man," he said ruefully. "Who is to pay for the salve to bring it down?" Alexei Yegorovitch refused to be depressed.

"Nonsense!" he said with a laugh. "It is only till to-morrow. Alexander Andreievitch when sober never

holds against a man the thing done to him while drunk."

"But the time set, man," Peter Nicolaievitch answered with a groan. "It is the time!"

"What is the time?"

"Daybreak to-morrow morning." The lieutenant's face grew suddenly grave and he whistled softly to himself.

"Is there no one who would dare to wake him up?" he asked thoughtfully. Peter Nicolaievitch shook his head.

"You know there is not," he said drily, "and if there were, his temper would be worse than it is to-night." Alexei Yegorovitch was silent for a space, preoccupied with thought. When he spoke it was with the air of having settled the matter to his satisfaction.

"Why not omit the whole thing?" he suggested cheerfully. "The old man will never rise in time to find it out." Peter Nicolaievitch fairly snorted his refusal of assent.

"Yes, and have Mashoff standing by his door before breakfast-time to tell him of it when he awakes! Besides, it would be bad for discipline."

"But this is a special case," urged the lieutenant.

"The Company has some rights," returned Peter Nicolaievitch doggedly, "and the men all saw it done." He turned on me with a querulous note of irritation in his voice.

"Damn you!" he said, "if you had to hit him, why couldn't you wait till the bidàrshik was gone back?" Again Alexei was silent in thoughtful calculation.

"We must go at it from the other side," he said

finally, with an air of conviction. "Whose business will it be to use the lash, Mikhail Etolin's?"

"No, Arseni Kuznetzof's. Mikhail Etolin is away."

"A new man," said Alexei Yegorovitch musingly, "but I suppose he can he reached."

"There it is again," broke out Peter Nicolaievitch with his show of anger. "It was Kuznetzof's wife that the little lady cast the spell upon when Fedor Kirilovitch was with her on the ship, and the man has a grudge against him for it that is dearer than his life."

"That makes no difference," said Alexei, with decision. "He will have to forswear himself for once. Come with me, Peter, and we will fix the whole matter up."

They went out together, leaving the pope and me seated by the fire. I did not care to talk, and Joassaf Petrovitch was too full of sympathy to know quite what to say. So we sat in silence and found our comfort in our pipes. I suppose I was not properly impressed by the peril I was in. The gravity of it sat upon me lightly, simply because I had never before come afoul of the law in such matters and had no standards by which to gauge my fear. Besides, the blow had been a just one and I had confidence in my friends. If the worst came to worst—though I had no certain expectation of it—I firmly made up my mind that I would take my punishment like a man.

It was ten minutes at least before a word was spoken. Then I saw the pope looking at me through the cloud of smoke that filled the room as if he would ask me something but did not clearly see his way.

"Well," I said, "what is it?" He accepted the question as an invitation and spoke up with an air of relief.

"Fedor," he said shyly, "you struck the commander and they say that it was a proper thing—but do I know why the blow was struck?" I looked at him in some astonishment.

"You heard them say," I answered, "that it was to prevent the commander's making free with Anna Gregorovna, who came over with us on the ship." He nodded his understanding, but was not yet at peace.

"Yes, but what interest had you in the matter if he did?"

"I trust," I said hotly, "that I would not stand by and see any woman wronged." He leaned back in his chair, and setting the tips of his fingers together, looked thoughtfully across them at the fire.

"I know," he said softly, "but was there no further reason? You did not strike him when the other women suffered wrong." I had not thought to search the matter for its philosophy and was not prepared to answer out of hand, so I met his question with another one and said:

"You mean, I suppose, that I care especially for the girl?" He did not change his attitude or lift his eyes.

"Y-yes," he said tentatively, still looking steadily into the fire. I considered a moment before answering, and he waited patiently for me to speak.

"Well," I said, with a show of frankness I did not altogether feel, "what wrong is there in it if I do?" The instinct of the priest made him ready instantly with his reply.

"The wrong that the woman belongs already to another man."

It startled me to find him turning back on me the argument I had advanced to Peter Nicolaievitch as a

reason for not joining in his plan, but it also brought to my lips in answer the philosophy of that individual which had proved more potent with me than my own.

"It is surely no harm to think it, if it is carried to no wrong. One is not blamable for what one feels."

"That is a mistake," said the old man earnestly. "It is not enough to be simply pure at heart. To disregard conventions is dangerous, if nothing more."

"But she is not married, and why is it wrong, if I think my chance good, to want her for myself?" The pope's face flushed sensitively as if what I had said was improper for him to hear.

"I am an old man," he said simply, "and have perhaps lost sympathy with youth, but to me it seems a crime to think of such a thing."

"Go back," I persisted, "to the time when you were young. You have been married and know how a man feels toward the girl he would make his wife. Would you have stood aside because another wanted her as well?"

The pope was silent for full a minute, his whole mind groping in the past I had so suddenly summoned up. He gave himself so wholly to the recollection that he seemed like one bound in a trance. As particular memories proved more vivid, his face worked spasmodically with the force of his emotion and he whispered brokenly to himself; but presently the trend of his recollection brought him naturally round to the question I had asked, and he answered me as if there had been no interval at all.

"With God's help, I did—and she went from me," he said solemnly. "I have never been a married man."

"How can that be," I burst out in amazement, "for surely you have been ordained?"

"I know the rule," he answered quickly, "but mine is the exception that makes sure the proof. When I came to my ordination, the bishop as usual chose for me a wife. She was the daughter of a priest and I had known her as a child. I had loved her and wanted her, and it was heaven to me when her father pledged to me her hand. She was a good girl, and promised as he wished, but before the day came it transpired that she had only liking for me, not love, and that her heart was centred on another man." He paused for a moment to regain his self-control, and my sympathy went out to him, for I knew how bitter the memory of it all must be.

"Well," he said with a sigh, "she went away with him—but I had come through my trials and the bishop made a special dispensation and allowed me, single, to enter on my work."

There is a deadly sinking of the heart that comes when one hears suddenly some treachery to a friend, and listening to his pitiful story I felt the thing grip me underneath my ribs. It seemed so useless that one so guileless and kind-hearted as the pope should have come to feel the pinch of such a sorrow, that, hearing it, my thought rose up instinctively in opposition.

"By God," I said, "you were well out of it!" But the pope's hand went up in protest and he sat suddenly bolt upright.

"No, no! Oh no!" he cried with earnestness that was almost pain. "It was I if anyone who was to blame. She came to me honestly with the truth, and,

God helping me, I let her go. When she went, I myself helped her to steal out unobserved."

"And you have never married since?"

"No," he answered, with a slight shake of his head, "I could not if I would. The betrothal was counted as a marriage in giving me the robes, and you know we are not allowed to marry twice." He let himself back again into his chair and took the time to regain his serenity of mind. I too was silent, not alone from delicacy, but because I really did not know what to say. When he spoke again, it was with a return to his ordinary voice.

"It proved itself right in the end," he said simply, "for she has been always happy, and I myself did not lose everything, for the memory has been very dear. It has indeed been not only a memory but an inspiration. I could not marry, and the thought of her has stood like a wall between me and the other thing from then till now. It is because I know the strength of being pure toward women, that I wanted to talk to you of your affair before I went away. I have been clean," he said with conscious pride, his voice rising exultantly in his conceit of sweet self-righteousness, "and the thought of it has always been a strength. It is the justification of my judgments where need comes in my work and the one thing that assures me of my fitness in it and my consecration. If I should lose it, I could not stay in the ministry a day. You, Fedor, have a different life, but the same cleanness will bring the same help to you. I love you," he said shyly, rising and coming to my side, "and I know you will let me warn you—if there is need."

He bent above me with such fatherly solicitude and

laid his hand so pleadingly on mine that I was glad that I could look back at him with honest eyes.

"My hands are clean, Joassaf," I answered with a smile. "Would it make the matter better for you if I told you that the girl cares more for me than she does for the man to whom she is betrothed?"

"Has she told you?" he demanded sharply. "How do you surely know?"

"No, she has not told me," I replied honestly. "At least she has not told me so in words, but down in my heart I know that it is so, and that is the justification I have in my pursuit. And there is another factor you have missed: the man to whom she is betrothed cares less for her than he does for another girl." The pope's eyes kindled with the confessor's interest in a secret, and he looked at me with growing understanding in his face.

"Marfa Alexandrovna?" he whispered.

"Yes." He was silent a moment while he thought the matter out.

"I understand, I think," he ventured, speaking more to himself than to me. "It is no wonder she was disturbed." He returned to his chair and I waited for further question, but none came.

"Well," I said finally, "are you satisfied that there has been no wrong?" He looked up at me from his reverie with real wistfulness.

"You will surely marry her, Fedor?" he asked.

With a sudden glow of feeling, for I had never before acknowledged definitely to myself that I really hoped to make her mine, I answered:

"Yes, if she will come to me, I surely will." The old man smiled radiantly and held out his hand.

"I am sorry I misjudged you," he said humbly. "The love of a good woman is a precious thing."

We both went back to our meditations and our pipes, and there was silence between us until Peter Nicolaievitch and Alexei Yegorovitch returned. They came in heavily and without speaking, and their sullen depression and downcast looks proclaimed that their mission had not found success. The pope was the first to break the silence.

"Did you see the man?" he asked with anxious eagerness.

"Yes, we saw him!" said Peter Nicolaievitch with a growl. He volunteered no further information, and it was with more timidity and only after a seasonable waiting that the pope ventured to speak again.

"Did he—er—refuse to do what you wished?"

"It is that trouble about his wife," broke in Alexei Yegorovitch irritably. "The man is bitter beyond belief. We promised him money or anything he liked—even to the getting Anna Gregorovna to take off the spell—but the best we could do was the promise that he would be as easy as his conscience would permit; and that we got by the threat that if he hurt you, the charm would work and his wife would have another seizure before night. From what I know of the woman," he added with growing satisfaction, "if he tells her what I said, I believe she will."

"You will get at least one blow," said Peter Nicolaievitch. "Aside from his malice, the man is honestly convinced that the sentence must be carried out and he will stand for one. As for the rest, it will depend on what he thinks he can afford to do. He would like to give them all to you if he could."

"Well," I said, "you have certainly done what you can, and I do not see anything else for it now but to make the best of it and go to bed."

Peter Nicolaievitch and the lieutenant steadily demurred and would have stayed with me throughout the night, but there are times when sympathy is worse than solitude, and after several attempts I drove them out. The pope made no further proffer of commiseration or regard, and we both undressed and went quietly to bed.

I did not readily drop off to sleep. Alone with my problem in the dark, it took hold of me as it had not done in the light. I was not afraid of the punishment that was to come, nor did it once weigh on me as a disgrace; but in the bravest men there is an honest nervousness born of the contemplation of pain that is to come. It is not a thing that saps determination or makes less strong the action of the will. But like a heartsickness, it hangs lead-weighted on one's peace of mind and makes it difficult to rest or sleep.

Yet in it all I do not think I cursed myself that the trouble had occurred. It is a fool thought, I suppose, for a man so old to have a thrill in having done a sentimental service to a girl, but when I thought how at the threat of harm her hand crept out and sought about for mine, I would have risked a second jeopardy to have it done again.

It was a dark night and still, and the smoke cloud in the room kept even the mosquitoes from their wonted noise. The pope had promptly fallen into sleep and I could hear his long-drawn, even breathing from his bed. As the air cooled in the room, the rafters sprang and cracked, the noise of them coming sharply in the

silence like reports of guns. I tossed and turned and could hold no position long. I essayed to count, and racked my brains to find some new jumble of repeated words to bring the monotony that would summon sleep. I must have found it somewhere, though I know not when it came; for suddenly, when I remembered, it was growing gray about the window and I heard Peter Nicolaievitch stirring in his room. I sat up in bed and rubbed my eyes to clearer sight. Then I put on my clothes and dashed my face with water till I was full awake. As I finished, the door opened and Peter Nicolaievitch came softly in.

"Good!" he said when he saw that I was dressed. With a voice pitched low lest he should wake the pope, he asked me to go out into the eating-room beyond. Here he had set out a bottle and two glasses and a plate of bread. He poured out a glass of vodka for himself and a larger one for me.

"Drink it all," he said authoritatively, and his manner was that of one who has done a wrong and seeks to make amends. "It will make you strong to bear it; but do not eat much bread. The strain brings sickness when the stomach is too full." He did not look at me, but went about with his eyes cast down as if in some way he was responsible for the trouble I was in. I drank the liquor at one draught, but the bread lacked taste and lingered drily in my throat. When I had done, he got to his feet and, still with his back toward me, said impersonally:

"It will be sun-up in ten minutes," and started for the door. I followed him briskly, for though my courage was down in the lowest depths, I would not for the world have had him think that I was afraid.

"Alexei Yegorovitch was up and coming with us," he said at we passed out, "but I thought you would prefer to go alone."

"You were right," I assented. "There is no need for other lookers-on." We walked in silence till the buildings had been passed and we came out on the south meadow where I had talked with Anna Gregorovna the day before. The place of punishment was on its eastern edge, and there, by the post erected for this need, I saw Arseni Kuznetzof and two other men already waiting for us in the growing light. Peter Nicolaievitch looked at them with gathering disgust.

"Damn Baranof!" he said between his teeth. "This is a business I do not like."

The men stirred themselves as we came up and the two guards stood at attention in deference to Peter Nicolaievitch's rank. Arseni Kuznetzof did not look at us or speak, but busied himself with unwinding the long bundle that contained his whips.

I was fascinated by his movements and stood at some paces' distance and watched him as he worked. He went about the matter with a studied coolness and, when the things were free, tried the thongs one after another, stretching the lashes and measuring them along the stocks and finally laying them in order on the ground.

From the time we reached the place, Peter Nicolaievitch's manner had changed. He was no longer the man, but the officer of the guard. He returned the salute of the soldiers and went over to where Arseni Kuznetzof stood.

"Is all ready?" he asked sharply, and his words had the precision of a military command. Kuznetzof assented with an inclination of the head. Peter Nicolaie-

vitch had evidently hoped for another answer and his face fell. At the end of his expedients, he delayed the punishment till he could make a last appeal.

"Come here, Kuznetzof," he said with a backward jerk of his head in my direction. "I want to talk to you." He returned to where I stood and the man slouched sullenly after him. When he stopped, the fellow halted in front of him and stood looking up at him with defiant eyes. Peter Nicolaievitch's face flushed with a sudden anger, but he held the feeling down and spoke in his ordinary official tone.

"Well," he said, "have you made up your mind? What are you going to do?" The man hung down his head and did not answer, but Peter Nicolaievitch waited without further question, and at length the fellow found the silence more embarrassing to him than speech.

"The order was made," he ejaculated slowly, without lifting up his head. Peter Nicolaievitch's face hardened, but he still retained his self-control.

"You understand the case, Arseni," he said with such persuasion as he could command. "The blow was given in a just cause, and you know as well as I that if this thing is held until Baranof is himself again, he will be the first to order it not done. He did it in Etolin's case not later than last month."

The man looked up at him and seemed about to answer as Peter wished, but in an evil moment his glance fell on me and his face darkened into its old expression of malevolent dislike.

"It is the order," he said stubbornly, and would say no more. He stood for a respectful interval as if awaiting Peter Nicolaievitch's command, but re-

ceiving none, turned slowly to where his whips were lying by the post. Peter Nicolaievitch checked him for a last appeal.

"One moment," he said. "You have thought clearly what the effect of this will be upon your wife?" Kuznetzof stopped, and a contraction as if of pain went across his face. He drew up his shoulders and his hands went out in passionate contradiction.

"I cannot help it," he declared. "It has been ordered!" I was ashamed we should thus coerce the man from what he thought was right.

"Let him alone, Peter," I interjected sharply; and then turning to the man—"Kuznetzof," I said, "there is no truth in that last matter. If you follow out your orders, no harm will come from it to your wife."

The man remained looking at me in dazed suspicion and crossed himself vigorously once or twice. Peter Nicolaievitch shrugged his shoulders and stood obediently back.

"All right," he said. "Have it your own way." I walked across to where the others stood and began to remove my coat.

"Come," I said, "let us get it over as quickly as may be." I stripped to the waist and took the position shown me at the post. Kuznetzof held up the bar to allow me to insert my wrists, and dropped and bolted it upon them without vouchsafing me a word. With the same cool air of unconcern he rolled up his sleeves, and selecting a whip, took up his station at my back. Peter Nicolaievitch, too, drew back till he was out of sight.

"Are you ready?" he asked huskily.

"Yes," I answered, and bent down my head. I felt

rather than saw that Kuznetzof stepped back and raised the knout. There was a distinct stir as he lifted himself on his toes and stretched to his full length to reach the maximum of his stroke, and I heard the sudden intake of his breath. Then like a living thing, the whip came down and caught me all along the back.

It was not at all what I had supposed the touch of a lash would be, and I had to grip hard on myself to keep from crying out. Each separate thong settled on me in a seamy line that burned like fire and remained fresh and stinging after the knotted cords had all been drawn away.

Kuznetzof waited long enough to let me experience to the full the exquisite torture of the pain, and then stepping to the other side, so that the change of position would lay the stripes in new and different lines, he raised the whip and brought it down again.

Even then I managed not to cry outright, but involuntarily my body writhed and cringed under the blow, and I felt myself go sick as death with the sudden agony. Again there was the pause, and in it I heard Peter Nicolaievitch's warning voice.

"Remember, Kuznetzof," he said, and his voice had in it the ringing menace of command, "go on with this cursed work if you like, but if you do, I myself will see to it that you, if not your wife, shall pay for it to the full. So take care what you do!"

The words seemed only to strengthen the bitterness of the man, for he had evidently made up his mind to go through with the thing and take the consequences. With an inarticulate snarl he turned himself to his task and raised his whip with the evident intention of striking

me again. I cowered as low as my taut arms would let me and braced myself to meet the horror that was to come.

I waited and waited, the seconds seeming hours, but the blow did not descend. There was an exclamation from the guards, a commotion of feet behind me, and the sound of a sudden fall. I gathered courage to look around and saw Arseni Kuznetzof lying on the ground with Peter bending over him and tearing wildly at his throat.

My first thought was that he had interfered to stop the blow, but a second glance showed me that the man had fallen in some sort of a fit and that Peter Nicolaievitch was rendering such aid as seemed suited to the case. The man's mouth was drawn to one side, his hands were cramped, and his feet beat an involuntary tattoo upon the ground. The guards looked on in horror and made no attempt to help. My instinct as a doctor brought me to myself.

"Open his neck," I said, when I could get my self-control. "Lay him with his head low so his throat will fill with air." Peter Nicolaievitch looked up from where he knelt and motioned to the guards.

"Undo the bar," he commanded, "and let the man out." But neither one would risk approach to me. They crossed themselves, and it was plain that they conceived the fit to be in some way my doing and in answer to Peter Nicolaievitch's demand. With an oath, he got to his feet and did the thing himself. I did not realise that I was so spent, but my hands, set free, slipped laxly from the hollows, and I slid down in a heap at the bottom of the post.

"Do not mind," I said, as he proffered help. "I

shall be better as soon as I am less faint." Peter Nicolaievitch was as tender as a girl.

"He shall suffer for this," he said indignantly, as he stroked my head; then he added under his breath, "Do you suppose the girl really had anything to do with his having this fit?"

"Go," I returned, "I want to be alone. Take the guards and carry Kuznetzof in. I will follow as soon as I have strength."

"Do not hurry," he said sympathetically, "I will arrange things for you at the house." He straightened himself, called the guards, and set them to lift Arseni Kuznetzof from the ground. He was limp again and began to show signs of conscious life. They got him up between them and disappeared with him in the direction of the fort, Peter Nicolaievitch looking anxiously back at me at intervals until they were fairly out of sight.

CHAPTER XIV

For some time after I was left alone I was content yet to be still. Then as the sting and faintness left me, I sat up cautiously and took stock of the plight that I was in. The keenness of the pain in my back had lessened, but as I reached up with my hand I could feel that the flesh had risen in great welts across it, and in one place, where the skin was broken, my finger-tips grew wet.

I reached out mechanically for my clothes, and with no little pain and hardship got into them one by one. The effort tired me, and I sat for a space to rest. Finally the impulse quickened and grew strong to get myself to home and bed, and with some difficulty regaining my feet, I got slowly under way. The motion helped me and my head became more clear, and with the clearness came the desire to avoid such stragglers of my kind as might be early out, and to gain the barracks and my chamber unobserved.

Fortune favoured me entirely at the start, but as I reached the edge of the meadow nearest the stockade —the place where yesterday I had stood with Anna Gregorovna and the child—I was aware of someone moving in the shadow just ahead, and stepped aside until whoever it was should pass. But no one came, and after waiting a moment I set out again. Once more I saw the person a little farther on, among the

trees, and this time I perceived it was a woman standing in the way.

It was only a question of time when I must face the whole pack in the place, and there could be small comfort in delay. I made up my mind on the spot that the sooner it began and ended for me the better, and plucking up my courage, I went steadily ahead. The figure remained where I had seen it, as if awaiting my approach, and as I came nearer I caught a something in the outline that was familiar to me, and so recognised that it was Anna Gregorovna who lingered, and knew that she was waiting there for me.

She was well back in the shadow and made no effort to meet me as I came. The air of bird-like lightness that was her most common trait was for the moment lacking, and she stood to wait for me, a shrunk, black figure with drooping head, and hands clasped in front of her in pathetic interrogation.

My first thought on seeing her was one of pleasure, and I felt a thrill of pride that she should have cared sufficiently to come. But I was yet too shaken physically to give heed to much beyond the desire for rest, and, even as it came, the sensation of joy gave way to a dull feeling of discomfort that even she should come between me and the quiet of sanctuary that I sought. Then, too, my conscience told me dimly that it was not fair to meet and talk with her when we were labouring underneath such stress.

But though it was discomfort chiefly that lay behind the thought, the effect upon my action was the same. I did not want to see her, and when I reached the point of the path where Anna Gregorovna stood, I turned my head away and went stolidly along. However, it

was not to be as I designed. Before I was well past her I heard her sob, and in another minute she called me by my name.

"Fedor—Fedor Kirilovitch," she said, and her voice was tremulous with the stress of her emotion. "Will you not even speak to me?" I stopped at once, turned back to where she stood, and answered her with apologetic gentleness.

"Forgive me," I said, "I had no meaning to disturb you, but I am sick somewhat and very tired and I forgot myself in my eagerness to be home." She did not seem to hear me, but stood with her eyes fixed straight before her, and her whole consciousness absorbed by what was on her mind.

"Oh," she cried, and her voice was almost a whisper—"oh, Fedor Kirilovitch, I saw it all!"

She swayed slightly forward and would have fallen if I had not caught her with a steadying hand. Her lips were without colour and there was no blood in her face. The faintness that follows the seeing of revolting things was strong upon her, and so deeply had the horror fixed upon her mind, that for the moment she was scarcely conscious of what she did.

"Do not think about it," I said soothingly. "It is over now and there is no need for grief." She paid no attention to my words but looked fixedly at my fingers, and reaching out, grasped me suddenly by the wrist.

"You are hurt!" she declared, and her voice had the sibilant thrill of tragedy. "There is blood upon your hand!" I smiled at her intensity and drew the offending member from her grasp.

"It is not vital," I said with as much lightness as I could assume. "It was the breaking of the skin where

the lashes crossed that made it. I touched it with my hand in putting on my clothes." She shuddered and remained with her eyes fixed upon me in the same dull fascination.

"Poor back!" she said, and reaching across my shoulder, touched it lightly with her hand. "And I was the cause of it!" she went on in keen self-accusation. "If I had been content to go when Marfa Alexandrovna urged me, it would not have come about."

"Do not grieve," I said again. "It is over now and it is best to forget that it occurred. It was a mistake, your coming out this morning. The thing was not fit for you to see."

"I had no choice," she cried. "There was no other way. Since I heard of it last night I have had no peace of mind. I had done you wrong, and in the dark I could not sleep and this morning I could not eat. There was no rest for me till I came to you and told you I was at fault." She paused uncertainly and I began again to speak in deprecation of her distress, but it was very real to her and she strenuously refused to hear it lightly met.

"It was not alone," she said shamefacedly and choosing her words as if she did not quite know what to say, "that I was foolish about going and so brought the trouble on, but when you warned me I spoke to you as if you were a coward and I thought you were afraid. It is of that I am ashamed. Will you believe me," she said, raising her eyes suddenly and looking me bravely in the face, "when I tell you that when I said it I did not think of you that way? It was only that I was vexed for the moment that you should interfere, and I let my feeling into unkind words."

She was still confused by the faintness that had come

upon her, and as she spoke she put out her hands unsteadily to support herself, and rested them against my breast. Her eyes were wide with entreaty, and before she finished speaking I saw them fill with tears. Had she been nothing to me, I could not but have forgiven her, and as it was, her self-abasement touched me to the quick.

"Dear heart," I said, and covered her hands with mine, "did I not tell you yesterday that I love you? How then could I so misunderstand you?" Her face flushed red at the answer and her eyes went down; but she made no move to draw away from me and did not take away her hands.

"I thank you," she said with some embarrassment. "I do not deserve that you should be so good to me when I can give you so little in return."

"But you do give something?" I demanded.

"Yes," she said softly, after a little pause.

"That is enough," I cried jubilantly. "You have given me a hope that will keep me glad till I come back to you again."

"Back?" she echoed in quick alarm. "You have not thought to go away?"

"What place," I answered, "is there here for a man discredited as I have been?" Again her lips began to tremble and her eyes filled with tears.

"I know," she said, "and it is I who have made the need for you to go." My confidence grew strong within me and I felt it prick me fiercely to try the matter now.

"There is the way out," I answered boldly, "that you should make the need for me to stay." She was silent for the moment and then looked up at me with shining eyes.

"So far as I am free to ask it," she said with earnestness, "you know I would not have you go."

"But that is not enough," I persisted. "The only thing that would hold me to remain would be that I could have you wholly for my own." She turned away her face and made as if she would have drawn away from me, but I would not let her go. When she spoke it was to avoid the question and throw herself upon my generosity by direct appeal.

"Why," she entreated, "do you ask for that which you know I cannot grant?"

"You can grant it," I insisted positively. "It is a question of the wish, not of the power." She pushed back from me to the full length of her arms.

"I cannot," she said piteously. "You know I have given my word. It is something you must not ask." I hardened my heart and pushed her relentlessly to the wall.

"Then you are content to let me go?" She quailed visibly but still had courage to reply.

"If needs must," she said faintly. "There is no other way." I felt my assurance drop blankly to the ground. I had been so certain of success that I had risked upon a single throw, and now there came to me the blunt conviction that in so doing I had been over sure. I cursed myself for having so roughly driven matters to a head; but the will stayed grimly with me to see the thing out to the end, and I set myself to save all the salvage possible from the wreck of my desire.

"Tell me," I said, "do you say this because you ought to, or because you do not care?" Either she distrusted her composure or was uncertain in her thought, for to the question she would answer not a word.

"Anna," I persisted, "I am going away from you and here—even if it is not the better thing—there can be no harm in my knowing the whole truth. Will you tell me, if only for remembrance sake, whether your heart is open toward me and whether you would be content to come to me if it were not that you are bound?" Still she did not answer and steadily looked down.

"Tell me!" I repeated, shaking her hands to emphasise the demand. She looked up quickly at me and as instantly looked away; but not before I had read the answer in her eyes.

"I do care," she said almost inaudibly, "and if I were free to come to you, I would be content."

"God bless you!" I cried impulsively and throwing prudence to the winds I caught her boldly in my arms. For a moment she was passive and gave herself to the embrace; then she remembered and struggled to be free.

"Oh no, no! You must not!" she cried breathlessly and pushed me back with her hands. I was ashamed that I had forgotten myself and freely let her go.

"Forgive me," I said humbly. "The temptation was more than I could bear." She was not angry, but once clear of me stood looking anxiously around.

"Go," she said pleadingly. "I could not bear that we should be seen together here alone." I would have spoken further but she was resolutely silent and turned away her head. So I left her standing in the shadow and took my way back toward the post.

I suppose a sorrier figure of a lover seldom thus parted company with his maid. In ordinary, my carriage is sufficiently erect and I affect a decent neatness in my dress; but now my back was stiffened with the

pattern of a whip, my hair dishevelled, and my legs so weak that my walk was only an unseemly drag. But I do not believe that daintier lover ever felt a greater lightness at the heart. I forgot not only my present ills but even the troubles that were to come, so that my progress was on air because of pleasant self-communion. Thus, in spite of physical distress, I was able to look back bravely at Joassaf Petrovitch when I met him at the barrack door and even made my greeting with a smile. The old man came down to me at once. He took my hand in both of his and there was a tinge of mystery mixed with the sympathy that was in his air.

"I have arranged it all," he whispered eagerly. "Your things are gone with mine and there is not even need for you to go inside."

"Gone," I echoed in astonishment, "gone where?"

"To the boat," he answered guiltily. "I took it on myself to send them out. You surely do not want to stay here at the post, and this bidarka will be the last for several weeks." The proposition took me entirely by surprise. While I had truly thought to go, I had not had in mind a scheme of quick departure such as this.

"But Joassaf," I said in some bewilderment, "where does this vessel take me if I go?"

"To the north," he replied encouragingly, as if this was the especial point of compass to which I wished to flee.

"To Yakutat?"

"No, this side." Then with some hesitation he continued: "I had planned that you should go ashore with me." I understood it now, and the knowledge brought an involuntary smile.

"Joassaf Petrovitch," I said rather drily, "has Providence given you a revelation of a mission for me as well as for yourself?" He looked at me wistfully, though I could see he was abashed.

"No," he admitted with a deprecatory shake of his head, "I do not know it is God's order you should go, but—I wanted you—and I hoped that you would come."

I thought the matter over and sought to make a quick decision in my mind. It was as good an avenue of escape as I could hope for unless I waited and went back later to Okhotsk on the ship. As I thought of Anna Gregorovna, the latter plan was utterly distasteful to my mind. The distance there would be too great, and the chance too large of never seeing her again.

The Indian village, too, would be a safe and quiet sanctuary and there I should not be more than a few days' distance from my happiness when I should feel it proper to return. Then, too, it appealed to me that I should be on hand to be of service to the pope instead of leaving him to go out to his martyrdom alone.

"It is not so bad a plan, Joassaf," I said musingly. "Only before I go, I should like something to eat."

"It is here in plenty," he replied with eagerness, pointing to one of the bundles at his feet. "The boat waits, and you can eat it when you are aboard." I made no more demur but followed where he led, and so little was I in love with the place that had thus lately given me shelter that in leaving it I did not once look back.

CHAPTER XV

BEING a young man still, it has commonly been a thought with me that rest was only for the old and that the vigorous failed of their full promise by just the hours let go in inactivity. But with the pain that caught me in my side, the stubborn stiffness of my welted back, and the relentless sting where my inner garments rubbed against the broken patches of my skin, there grew in me a new and wholesome reverence for the value of repose. It was not wasted time, but a sane seizing upon vigour, to lie at rest in the bottom of the boat and let the hours go by in idleness.

The bidarka was a great one built to carry forty men and, under the paddles, skimmed across the level sea as if it were a live thing having wings. There were some thirty souls of us all told and, besides the pope and me, but two were white. These were the government messengers between the posts, who looked not only to despatches but also to the food and like supplies which went from Sitka to the stations inland and removed.

The whole ocean was traversably smooth, but for the most part we kept near the shore. Only where there was distance to be gained by run from point to point of some deep-lying bay did we venture out at all into the open sea. Had the thing been planned by choice we could not have picked for travel a season more beautiful to the eye or more grateful to the heart. The fort-

night that had elapsed since we came to this new land had worked a magic change in earth and sea and sky. The winter fog and cold had passed away and with them the gloomy air of inhospitableness which had seemed at first the mastering characteristic of the place.

It was full summer now, with all the softness and sweet familiarity that summer brings. The air was mild and pleasing, the shores were warm with colour where the flowers lay in great streaks and drifts, and we never passed an island or high point without raising from the rocks a sudden cloud of sea birds, white or gray, which shrieked discordantly and whirled in dizzy circles round about our heads.

There was small talk among us, and that in quiet voice. The natives in these parts have not the light-heartedness that marks the dwellers of Kadiak and the isles. They neither laughed nor sang while at the labour of their oars, and all day long without show of pleasure or of pain were pleased to look on life with calm indifference of mind.

The two messengers were more human in their ways and sometimes talked. But they were shy men, with more of hunters' than of traders' gifts, and by that difference lacking in full fellowship. The pope was tasting the joy that came from the fruition of his hopes and was therefore utterly content. He sat in his place, a happy man, and sang to himself and trailed his hand in the water along the side of the boat with all the frank abandon of a child.

As for myself, I scarcely missed the companionship and was glad to be alone. It was too soon to formulate a plan for future work. I was content to wait the

inclination, being wholly sure that when I needed it the proper chance would come. In the meantime it tickled my imagination that Fate, or Providence rather, if I believed the pope, had arranged me in the cast of my immediate future to play the preacher's part among these heathen of the north.

Perchance my strength of arm would be of use to supplement the salvation accomplished by the pope, in that it might serve to hold permanently in the fear of the Lord such souls as he brings in. But I doubted the force of my theology for turning them primarily to that salvation. Still, it was a good work and promised interest, and I was careful in discussing it with Joassaf Petrovitch to hide from him that I was approaching it with a smile.

Concerning Anna Gregorovna I was not equally at peace. I longed continually to see the girl and never thought of her without a foolish yearning to have her at close range. It had not seemed so hard a thing at first to go away and leave her there behind. My mind then was so full of the affair with Baranof that there had been small space in it for anything outside the one wild wish to get away. Perhaps, too, my conceit, following on the sudden certainty that in part, at least, Anna Gregorovna returned my love, made me flatter myself foolishly that my interest with her stood in no danger of immediate wreck.

But once away, with cooler blood and time for clearer thought, the thing took on a very different light. The matter did not seem so sure to wait on my returning; and the more I thought of it, the more it appeared a foolish, if not a dishonourable, thing that I had gone away and left her unadvised, at the mercy of the man

with whom she had so honourably refused to break her troth. It was not at all impossible that the vacillating lieutenant might yet turn again to Anna Gregorovna and hold her firmly to her word.

The idea stirred me so deeply when I thought of it that, had it been possible, I would have turned the expedition back, but when it came we were already far upon the way, and all I could do was to promise myself to cut my exile to its shortest decent length and resign myself with patience to go on. My only comfort came in the thought that Alexei Yegorovitch was in no mood unduly to push the wedding on, and down in my heart I nursed the conviction, born of hope, that the girl herself would not consent to such a step until she heard again from me.

So the hours passed comfortably and without a drag, and it was a real regret to me when, in the late afternoon, the great canoe slowed gently to the shore and left us with our trappings on the land.

Marfa Alexandrovna had been better than her word and had furnished us not only with an interpreter, but also bearers to advance our loads. My back forbade the burden of a pack, and I alone of all the party went light-freighted on the way. But the loads, divided out, sat gently on the others as to weight, and the pope even found in his naught of inconvenience.

We walked for nearly an hour before the stopping for the night, and in that time left the water and shore line far behind. There was a rough path leading inland from the sea, an ordinary native highway for going out and in, but there were no huts or clearings or other signs along it to show in this wilderness there was human life. The wet moss beds gave way to meadows after

the first rise, and we walked with drier feet. Just before dusk we emerged from a forest so close set that in it it was already dark, and came out on a level place where a group of Indian huts was still visible in the failing light.

My first thought was that we had come to our journey's end, but a second glance showed me that the village was deserted, the roofs broken in and tumbling, and the whole place overgrown and mouldy with decay. The thing excited curiosity, and I asked the interpreter how it came about.

"It was a pestilence," he said, "that happened four years ago. If you will look around, you can still see the bones." Involuntarily, I let my eyes run quickly round the place. It was a fact that here and there about the houses there were heaps of bones that had failed of proper burial, and their number showed that in the swift affliction that had come upon the village a majority of the inhabitants must surely have succumbed.

Though not the end of our journey, I saw that this charnel-house had been fixed upon by the guides as a resting-place for the night. The natives paused before a larger hut and, laying down their burdens, began collecting material for a fire. The pope sat down without a comment and made himself at home; but it seemed to me a foolish thing to lie within the circle where men had come through plague to such a swift and wholesale end, and I stoutly expressed my doubtings to the guide.

He listened gravely and, before answering, turned to speak to the bearers in the native tongue. They looked at each other with a conscious air of under-

standing and then laughed outright. The interpreter turned again to me with the grin still on his face.

"I have spoken to the others," he said, "and they all agree that you need not feel afraid. They know the kind of plague that took these people, and it is not the sort to linger in their bodies to do harm." I was not satisfied, but there being no help for it I let the matter pass and set myself to establish our comfort for the night.

The empty room in which we spread our beds was not so cheerless when we were all in. With the help of a little oil, the fire on the middle stones burned brightly enough for sight, and the smoke and the smell of the cooking did much to render us content. The natives herded by themselves and stayed by the fire to eat. The pope and I, as befitted the dignity of our station, kept to ourselves as well, and chose to receive our portions outside of the door. It was pleasant in the twilight and there was better air.

"How still the night is," said the pope, stopping meditatively in the middle of his meal. "When God saw fit to lay these souls to rest, He surely gave to them a dreamless sleep."

"I wish," I answered, "that I knew more of the balm with which He closed their eyes." It was my professional instinct, I suppose, for my glance at the moment was on a heap beyond us that marked the spot where some poor wretch had rotted where he fell.

"Wait a moment," I said rising, and setting down my plate on a convenient log. "I will look at these bones and see what they have to say." The sun had long been gone and the Arctic twilight, though it lasts for hours, gives a light too dim for close inspection, and

the bones too were bleached and worn beyond the power of telling tales. But as I stirred the litter with my foot I saw that about a leg-bone in the heap which made me stoop and pick it up. It was the great bone of the thigh and was split laterally for a portion of its length; and in the crack was bedded an arrow-head made of stone. The thing gave me an idea and I passed to another heap. There was no like marvel in it such as I had before found, but near it I came upon a skull bent in and broken at the back as if the man who owned it had been struck with some blunt instrument from behind.

Other like evidences were not difficult to find, and in a few minutes I had collected an armful of these mute witnesses of a great past tragedy and carried them back with me to the door. Laying them in a row on the log where we had been sitting, I handed the split leg-bone to the pope. He looked the collection over slowly and crossed himself before he spoke.

"They were murdered then!" he said in a whisper.

"Yes," I answered, "the plague that took them may have come from God, but in its application it was an assisted scourge."

It was a relief, though, since we were to occupy their place, to find that these poor souls had died of killing and not some foul disease. My curiosity was satisfied and I turned again to where I had set down my plate; but the food that had been on it was all gone. I lifted the thing up and turned to the pope in some surprise.

"Did you not have dinner enough of your own," I asked in playful accusation, "that you have also taken mine?"

"I saw it done," he said placidly. "It was some animal. I think it was a dog."

"Why did you let him take it?" I demanded ruefully. The pope shrugged his shoulders and dropped his eyes to his feet.

"He did not ask permission," he vouchsafed gently, "and I did not see him till his nose was in the plate."

"Well, there is more," I said lightly and shouted for the guide.

"Bring me something to eat, in a clean dish," I commanded, "and also my gun and some loose scraps on this plate." He did as I had ordered, and setting the plate of scraps where it had been before, I seated myself by the pope, leaned my gun within easy reach, and prepared to finish my meal.

"Let us see if he will come again," I said threateningly. The pope looked on with growing disapproval.

"Surely," he murmured, "you would not kill the beast. It was only that he was hungry and in need."

"It was not your dinner that was eaten," I said grimly, and went on with my meal. But my heart softened as I waited, and well before the animal appeared I had made up my mind that I would not do it harm.

I first saw it in the shadow beside a fallen tree. It edged furtively from spot to spot of shade, and, growing bolder, paused for a moment and stood to sniff the odour of the cooking that came to him on the wind. It was a lean and ragged specimen of the native dog, yellow and unkempt and not yet fully grown. I recognised him as one of the class of strays, escaped from his place in the sledge team, that, separated from man's

care, eked out as best it might a thievish living in the woods.

The pope saw it when I did, and, fearing for my discretion, rose quickly to his feet. He went to the plate of scraps, lifted it from the log, extended it in invitation and called to the dog to come. The animal remembered enough of his former associations with mankind to hold his ground and wait, though he circled around Joassaf Petrovitch, keeping well out of reach.

I doubt if the lure alone would have proved enough, for the beast was overcoy; but one of the natives stepped out with a strap in his hand, and striking it loudly against the leg of his boot, called peremptorily to the dog in the native language to lie down. The noise and the customary tone of authority had their immediate effect. The beast squatted instantly and remained in his place, and the native, walking up to him as if the thing were a matter of every day, fastened the thong about his neck and tethered him to a convenient bush.

The pope thanked the man as if there had been real service in the deed, and set himself to make the acquaintance of the brute. At first the dog would have none of his regard and showed its teeth and strained away from him at the full stretch of its rope. But hunger is keen in stimulating faith, and animals are quick to choose out those who are their friends. First the bits of meat were accepted at long range, and then from the hand, with slow advance and panicky retreat; but the pope was patient and found the matter near his heart, and before I tired and went in for the night the animal was supping contentedly from the plate and

Joassaf Petrovitch sat by him, beaming, with his hand on the creature's head.

The night passed comfortably and we were early on the road. There was no change in the disposition of the party except that when we were loaded and ready for the way I saw that the pope had with him the vagrant cur, led in leash, with the evident intention of taking him along.

"Have you not troubles enough without the burden of that beast?" I asked in some derision. "You had better leave him to his fate." But the pope smiled and firmly shook his head.

"He was the first heathen in this land," he said, "that God delivered into my hand. I take it as an omen that I prevailed with him. Surely you would not counsel that I leave my first convert by the way?"

I laughed at the conceit, for really the matter made small trouble for any but himself. The only interference with me personally came from the fact that the dog's presence made me travel wider of the pope. The beast's conversion was purely personal to him. It had understanding enough to recognise him as a base of supplies and so accepted him. But it had no illusions as to the other members of the party, and used its teeth to such effect that after the first mile we came to travel well outside the limit of its bond.

The way went over a mountain, tree grown, and at the higher levels still wrapped in snow. Beyond it the slope fell swiftly down again to the level plain, and here upon the border of a little lake we came upon the village we had sought.

At the first glimpse of it the pope set down his burden and stood to gaze, crossing himself silently and letting

his lips move in a silent prayer. Then almost unconsciously we quickened our steps and, translating into action the eagerness that possessed us to be at our journey's end, made the last distance in breathless time without a thought of effort or fatigue.

At the outskirts of the village we were met by a party of three men. The leader among them was a short man of stolid manner and ugly enough in face and feature to inspire a great respect. He spoke in a tone of authority to the interpreter, who turned to us at once.

"It is the chief," he said. "He wishes to know if you belong to the party which was here three days ago?" The pope and I looked at each other in surprise.

"Who do you suppose they were?" he said to me with curiosity.

"I cannot guess," I answered. "It is certain no one came here from the post." Joassaf Petrovitch turned again to the interpreter.

"We are alone," he said, "and have no connection with any other men." This was conveyed to the chief, and he received it with a shrug of disbelief.

"Very well," said the interpreter, delivering his answer, "he desires then that you remain where you are and show what you have for trade."

"But we are not traders," protested the pope, "and these are only our own personal effects. Tell him that we do not wish simply to come and go, but have been sent to live with him and his people here in this place." This information being imparted, the chief seemed in some perplexity and held himself suspiciously aloof. Then, in answer to his direction, the interpreter went on:

"If you are not traders he does not understand why

you should wish to stay." The pope's imagination fired at once.

"It is for his sake, not mine," he said solemnly. "We came on God's work and seek no recompense for ourselves. All we wish is to tell him and his people about God, and through God's help to make them better men."

The statement, promptly transmitted in the vernacular, bade fair to bring the usual stir that follows the propounding of new doctrines of the faith. The chief listened patiently and at the close began himself to talk. He was a dignified savage and impressive in his speech, and held his temper providently in hand. He addressed himself now to one of his listeners and now to them all together, and it was plain that collectively they were struggling with the thought, and fain to work the problem out. Finally the chief gave up the struggle with a laugh, and the interpreter turned again to us.

"It will be permitted you," he said, "that you may stay. The chief says there are some very bad people in this place whom he will be glad to have made good, and he is pleased that you have come. But before you go into the village he must see your things and judge if what you say is true."

The way of obedience was the easiest in this case, so our packs came down and were untied and thrown open on the ground. The chief attacked them with the curiosity of a child, examining each article in turn and talking volubly with his assistants all the time. The lust of longing was upon him, and my blood boiled as I watched his covetous touch as he fingered greedily the pope's sacerdotal robes.

Joassaf Petrovitch was complacent and finally gave him as a present an undervest of green which seemed particularly near his heart. He donned it promptly, and there being no more to see, reluctantly allowed the packs to be closed as before. But no sooner were we again in motion and the matter plain that we were permitted to go on, than the bonds of silence around us were loosened and the whole village rose up from the cover where they had been hid and with shouts and laughter settled down upon us as a lawful prey. The men were not so dreadful, but the women had no fear. They lacked entirely in reticence of mind and clacked to each other about our appearance and fingered with uncanny freedom such portions of our clothes and persons as it suited their curiosity to touch. The examination was good-natured and done without intention to displease. Joassaf Petrovitch, seasoned by his priestly occupation, received their attentions in fair part; but for myself I was glad when the chief's house was reached and we found between us and the curious crowd the barrier of its restraining walls.

The chief, whose name is Shakmut, has three wives and many children and is a great man, gauged by the standards of his world. He fed us sumptuously on fish and meat, and as a final dainty served us with a bowl of mountain berries drenched with oil. With me, to look at them brought swift revolt, and even Joassaf Petrovitch, who to this point had taken cheerfully whatever came, tried but one mouthful before letting go the bowl.

We held the seats of honour at the meal, and beyond us, ranged in the order of their rank and age, were the other members of the family. Each dish was passed

directly to the chief, who, without tasting it, handed it to us. When we had eaten what we wished it was returned to him, and he then satisfied his hunger to the full. From him it went in order to the wives, and then down along the line to the smallest child. I thanked my stars that our hands went in before the other hands, and, at the same time, wondered at the patience of the ones who had to wait. The older people were apathetic and made no exposition of their need, but down the line among the smaller heads there was a row of wide black eyes that followed hungrily each movement of the bowls, and where their contents grew unduly less this interest kindled almost into fear.

The interpreter found little time for rest, for the pope talked unceasingly while he ate and kept him busy as a go-between. Shakmut was gracious and promised everything he wished.

"To-morrow," he said, "you shall have a house and men to set it right; and in your work we will help you as we can. You say you came to make my people good. It is a wonderful thing and one of which we have much need. I have a brother, Kettlewah, and he is the worst man in this place. He shall go to you to-morrow, and it will be a great relief to me when you have made him good." Joassaf Petrovitch heard in mild surprise.

"Tell him," he said to the interpreter, "that he does not wholly understand. I shall be glad to talk with his brother when he comes, but whether he is made better will depend wholly on the man himself and on the saving grace of God." This being translated to the chief, he considered for a moment, looking shrewdly at Joassaf Petrovitch with his half-closed eyes.

"Are some men so bad, then," he said ironically, "that they cannot be made better by your God?"

"Oh, no, no!" cried the pope as he caught from the interpreter what the other meant. "There is none so bad he cannot be saved if only he will come to Him." He rose unconsciously in the excitement of his earnestness, and planting himself before the chief, launched into warm discussion of the doctrines of his creed. At first the interpreter waited, expecting him to stop; and when he did not, tried in vain to break in on the current of his speech. The thing was useless, so he gave it up and stood to wait till the flood of eloquence should of itself subside.

Shakmut kept his eye upon the speaker and listened with the air of one who understood; so the pope found no reminder that he sowed in stony ground, and let the stream of eloquence go on. But the chance came that a particularly fiery period found its end in a direct interrogation to the chief. Then the shadow of vacuity in Shakmut's face gave to the pope an inkling of the truth and he turned and caught the gleam of humour in my eye. His face flushed and he looked again at me with the shamefacedness of a guilty child.

"Truly, I forget," he said apologetically. "It seemed somehow as though he must surely understand." But his embarrassment went again as quickly as it came and he turned to make the interpreter his saviour from mistake.

With infinite patience and slowness he began to go over the whole thing again. The repetition had small interest for me and I let myself forget it in the comfort of my pipe. The pair talked and talked and worked the interpreter without end; and were still at it when

the men came in to lay down on the platform our bedding for the night. The pope was in high feather with himself and the world.

"God is surely in this place," he said solemnly. "There is a boy here now who has been a hostage with our people and is already instructed in our faith. He is to come to us to-morrow when we are settled in our house. The leaven seems already working in this family here and when the chief comes in there will be more." Down in my heart my faith was less than his, but it would have brought him only pain had I gainsaid him, and I wisely held my peace. We were still about our preparations for the night when the interpreter once more came back to us.

"The chief," he said to the pope, and his air was of one who bore good tidings, "desires that you be happy while you are doing good. He will give to you the one of his wives you may wish to choose, to be a wife to you while you are in this place, and he wishes you to say which one of them you prefer, so that he may arrange the matter now." The thing came like a thunderbolt from a clear sky and the pope blinked and gasped as if he had been struck. The power of speaking failed him and he blushed up to his hair.

I looked across to where the chief and his wives stood waiting for the judgment and realised with delight that the women had been counselled of the matter and were watching with absorbed interest the man who was to choose. Then I looked again at this northern Paris brought to unwilling choice and I nearly laughed aloud. I think we both realised that the offer was made in innocence as well as honest faith, but that did little to dispel the pope's confusion for the time. At

embarrassment to me.

"What shall I do?" he whispered faintly.

"Take one of course," I said with growing joy. "You surely would not wish to offend the chief. The little one seems to be the most attractive—and anyway, a wife is a handy thing to have about the house."

"Be silent," he broke in in stern reproof. "Are you never serious?" He thought for a moment while he made up his mind. Then turning to the interpreter he said:

"Which one of these women did the chief first take to wife?"

"See here, Joassaf," I murmured in ironic disapproval, "would it be right for you to choose that one, do you think?" He gave me another indignant look, but vouchsafed no reply.

The interpreter put the question to the chief in open council, and I watched with interest the breaking of the news. Both Shakmut and the women received the word with some surprise; but the effect of it upon the latter was plain to understand. The little one shrugged her shoulders, laughed consciously and said something to the others in a subdued tone. The one who had first been wife did not blush because her skin was too dark to let the colour show, but no one could mistake that she understood that the choice had come to her and felt it as a triumph over the younger pair. The pope saw this as well as I and stood shamefaced and helpless, waiting for the word.

"The chief is satisfied," said the interpreter, coming back. "Her name is Nikta. She is the older woman to the left." With rare control the pope held in his

feelings and made his answer with almost his usual calm.

"You have mistaken my desire," he said dryly. "I have neither wish nor thought to choose. Tell the chief that the reason for the asking was that it is not right for a man to have more than one wife at a time. This Nikta is the only wife he has, and God will not be with him till he puts the other two away. As for myself, I have no wish for any of the three. My life is given wholly to God's work, and in it there is neither need nor leisure for a wife."

When he began to speak the interpreter's face still held the puzzled expression it had caught, on the announcement, from the countenances of Shakmut and the younger wives. I am not sure he wholly grasped the argument of Joassaf Petrovitch's theology, but he lost nothing of the fact that the decision in favour of the older wife had been but a mistake; and when he realised it, his perplexity passed away and his mouth stretched out into a delighted grin. Most times he gave no sign of interest in his work and went about it with a stolid face. But this translation came quite to his taste, for he entered upon it with a positive air of glee and spoke the message with a glibness that confirmed in me the feeling that the religious side of it was not strongest in his mind.

The family heard him through with an interest that did not flag. Shakmut's face remained impassive, his feelings in the matter being evidently of divers kinds. But before the interpreter was done, the two younger women fairly laughed aloud and looked from the pope to Nikta with eyes that danced with mirth.

The discarded woman answered not a word but stood for a full moment in the shadowy light, gazing at the

pope with eyes that had in them somewhat of anger, but more of sorrowful reproach. Then without deigning further notice, she turned away from the whole group and went silently about her work around the house.

Shakmut found no wish to raise the gauntlet Joassaf Petrovitch had thrown down, and contented himself with passing the matter with a shrug. The pope's face grew calm again, but he had scarce regained his old serenity of poise when we were left to make us ready for the night.

"They did not mean it badly," he said gently. "To them the offer was a kindness, not a crime. It is not unlike they all have extra wives. But the wrong is there, just the same," he added sturdily, "and I shall insist that Shakmut give them up."

CHAPTER XVI

THERE is no stimulus to right living more powerful than the holding of a cheerful mind. The man who is light-hearted finds small need to quarrel with his fate, and he who laughs at fortune is commonly surest of attracting her regard. But there are times and places which demand the sober front, and the salvation offered to these natives by the pope requires a seriousness of recognition which it seems beyond their power to give.

They have listened readily to all his homilies and pleas, they have attended each service as if it were a show, they have brought their friends and babies to be made good, and baptised; but when it has come to solemn introspection and the arduous applying of his doctrines to the cleansing of their lives, they have failed entirely to take hold upon the need, and lightly shifted the obligation with a laugh.

In the number of our converts there has been naught to ask. We have been here now three weeks and have set the seal of baptism upon forty willing heads. Shakmut still holds out and is without the pale. It stirs his soul to think of giving up his wives; but the pope has been as hard as iron, and without the sacrifice will not seal him into faith. And truly it is an ordeal more harsh for this native than for the common man. It is pain enough to lose a single wife, and the double loss cannot but bring to him a special strain.

The question of the wives has come to be a danger in our way. The men we might convince, but the women have been unheeding and against us one and all. They have openly scoffed at changing in this regard and jeered at the restraint that would give but one of them to one man. The excess in numbers is with the softer sex, and I shrewdly guess that behind the play of their derision has been the hidden fear that if the new allotment came, a part of them would surely fail of place.

The first convert to come in was Parka, the youth who had been a hostage at the fort. The pope sought him out early the first day and took him to be with us in our house. There is no doubt that Shakmut has done all that he agreed and, for my part, I would set off this service to his credit, and let him keep his wives. The house he gave us is commodious in that it has three good-sized rooms. It is beside the lake, convenient for baptising the accessions to our flock, and Shakmut has had it put to rights, and rendered habitably clean.

We left the chief's house early, after our first night in the place, and without ceremony set up our household for ourselves. Till this was done, the pope was restless and had no peace of mind, and though no sign was made of further thought to saddle us with wives, he kept a wary eye upon the women as they went about the house and altogether had an air of fearful certainty that they would pounce upon him if they caught him off his guard.

But once in our own place, his confidence returned, and scarcely were we settled when I saw him laying out his robes and dressing for the first public service of his work. Clad in his full vestments, he took up his bell,

and pausing a moment for a last silent prayer, went forth into the open and vigorously rang.

The thing as yet had no significance to the savage mind, and for the moment not a native came. But for all that, the summons was near to costing the pope the one convert he had already made. When he began to ring, the dog, which had been transferred with our other luggage to the place, lay tethered by the doorway almost underneath his feet. It was the first time evidently that the creature had ever heard a bell, and the clangour just above its head came as a sharp surprise. At the initial peal it woke with a leap that lifted it from the ground and with a yelp of terror fled away with such heedless speed that, coming to its tether's end, it brought up with a snap and tumble that well-nigh broke its neck.

It lay so still the pope believed it to be dead, and dropping his bell, he went to its relief. The beast was only dazed and, being turned over, kicked vigorously and got slowly to its feet.

"You are right, Joassaf," I said with a smile. "The animal is clearly convicted of sin to be so frightened at the call to God."

"It did not understand," he said in mild excuse. "Though there is keen quickening in the real fear of the Lord!"

"The same objection runs to all of your proposed flock," I said. "They are here for the saving, but the trouble is to make them understand."

The dog was led away and tethered in a more quiet spot, and the pope returned to the ringing of his bell. This time the prolonged note was sufficiently alluring to be accepted as a call. By twos and

threes the natives came and gathered near at hand until the pope had a fair-sized audience to whom to preach.

He began with an impassioned prayer for help, and then passed around among them, sprinkling holy water from a bowl. They looked upon the process as some sort of magic spell and shrank away from contact with him, moving out in front and falling in again behind to watch his motions, so that there was a pleasing kaleidoscopic effect of constant motion in his congregation that was as interesting as it was unique.

When he had blessed them all, the interpreter was called and the pope talked to them of God and the saving of their souls. They stood like children, open-eyed and charmed, and gave close attention to his words. But when he asked that those whose hearts were touched should come and make profession of their faith, though there was much talk among them and no little stir, not one of them obeyed.

The next day, on the same inquiry, the boy Parka, having been questioned privately by the pope and declared of proper mind, stepped out before the gathering and announced his readiness to believe with us and throw in his faith with ours.

It would have been a callous heart that was not stirred by the simple exaltation of Joassaf Petrovitch while he set the seal of consecration on this first regenerate heathen soul. His face shone like a god's, and when the ceremony was done and the two came up together from the lake, wet as the boy was, he gathered the young convert in his arms and blessed him in a voice that choked almost beyond control. As for the natives looking on, their confidence in the practice

remained seriously in doubt, and one who spoke a little Russian asked me in private if the boy would die.

The following day two other boys came forward in like mind, and an old woman brought a baby and laid it in Joassaf Petrovitch's arms. It was scrawny and thin and weak, but I afterwards found it interesting in that it had a skin eruption I had never before seen. The pope looked at it questioningly and bade the interpreter ask why it had been brought.

"That it may be baptised," the woman answered promptly.

"But," said the pope, "it is too young to know and there is no Christian of its race to be sponsor for it." The woman shrugged her shoulders and put her hands behind her back.

"We know that as well as you," she said coolly, "but its father and mother are dead and it is sick and all alone, and we thought if it should be baptised it might change its luck." The pope's eyes filled with tears and he turned and looked shamefacedly at me.

"Heaven forgive me," he said, "that I should ever forget that there is always help in God!" He raised the little creature tenderly and went down with it to the water's edge. As is the custom with young children, he did not dip it wholly in the lake, but contented himself with lifting a little water in the hollow of his hand and pouring it gently on the baby's head.

When he was done, he went back to the woman and held out to her the child; but, for fear of evil, she would not take it, now it was baptised, and shook her head and, as soon as might be, shrank back into the crowd. He tried giving it to another with the same result, and in all the gathering found no woman with a tenderness

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safety by the doing of this charitable act. At length the pope gave up the matter in despair, and kept the babe, and it became an inmate of our house.

One thing our sojourn here has brought clearly out. I talked with the chief concerning the men of whom he spoke to us on the day that we arrived, and he showed me a parchment, given by them, confirming him in his authority under our lord, the Czar. It is signed by Lastockin, who is not our friend, and it is plain that Lebedef and his people have stolen a march on us and are secretly taking possession of the country on their own account. Though I do not love Baranof, I resent this treachery to the cause he represents and I am convinced he should be told of it that he may be on his guard. And to that end, unless occasion offers, I shall make opportunity to send a message concerning it to the post.

The newness having passed, after the first week the tally of men in the congregation fell steadily away. The women remained constant, though I had no question but I discerned in them a waning reverence for the holy office of the pope. They cannot understand in him the reprobation of their family affairs. They have discovered that he fears them as a sex, and they seldom miss an opportunity to teach him that like other men he is not wholly proof against their charms.

They stand close to him when he talks or prays. They touch his garments and run their eyes approvingly along the outlines of his form. They gaze up at him with bright looks and deport themselves as if the only object in their lives was to stand well sentimentally in his regard.

The worst of the matter is that in these doings there

and do without a thought of wickedness things that for a woman of our race to do would set her irrevocably without the pale. The frank simplicity of these northern women so clearly marked them as without evil thought that, more commonly than not, the pope shut his eyes as best he could and let the thing that shocked him go unreproved. He felt somehow that such a rebuke would only argue as an evidence of his own uncleanliness of mind.

The only one to treat him with disfavour was Nikta, Shakmut's oldest wife. She did not forget the slight she deemed he put upon her in refusing her as wife, and whenever her eyes met his there was an angry glow in them that spoke full plainly of the wish within; though she did not often look at him and for the most part when she met him turned away her face. Yet I believe that in the immunity it gives him, the pope blessed her for her dislike and, if he conveniently could, would have given over all the others unto anger.

There was one damsel in especial who looked at him with large eyes and frankly leaned upon his liking for her joy. She was less flippant than the rest, being, I suppose, more staid in disposition, and she never missed a meeting from the first.

On the ninth day she came forward and professed the wish to walk in the way the pope had pointed out, and went gladly with him down into the lake. She was the first native of mature years to make her covenant with God, and it struck me that the pope in his satisfaction was somewhat indiscreet in his expression of the tenderness with which he welcomed her into the fellowship of hope.

"She was my first," he said when I remonstrated with him in the matter. "I have never had a daughter, but I was so glad for her in her coming that my heart went out to her with all a parent's thought."

"It is no doubt all right," I said with some reserve. "My fear was simply that she would come to interpret the matter in the selfsame way."

The girl made no reciprocation at the time, and after her immersion went quietly away. But the event bore out my judgment even as I had feared. On the afternoon of that day we took our three boys and went fishing in the river beyond the town. The sport was good and the catch plentiful, and the pope planned that the fish be dried and stored against our later winter need. When, in the late afternoon, we reached the house again, we found the convert there in full possession, her things stored neatly in the inner room and her intentions plainly fixed on making it her home.

The pope stopped in the doorway and looked at her aghast. She had caught the proper idea of her place within the house and was tending the fire and working cheerfully about the cooking for the coming evening meal. He recovered from his astonishment and went to where she stood.

"Why are you here?" he asked with some severity. She understood no word of Russian, and answered only with a smile.

"Get the interpreter quickly," said the pope, and held himself with such patience as he could until his mouthpiece came. Then he made again the same demand of the girl.

"Why," he said, "do we find you here in our house?"

The girl looked from the interpreter to us without embarrassment but with evident surprise.

"Was it not right?" she asked in some alarm. "All the others have come here to stay."

"No," returned the pope, "the others were all boys." The girl received the rebuff in sober silence and did not answer till she had thought the matter out. Then she said—and there was a flutter of scorn about her upper lip:

"If you did not want the women, why did you ask them to come in?"

"Because," said the pope, "I spoke as God's messenger in doing it and never for myself. The salvation was for them without their coming here." The girl hung on his lips as if she would surprise from them the meaning of his words before they came to her in her own tongue.

"Does he mean," she demanded breathlessly, "that I am to go away?"

"Yes," said the pope laconically.

She stood still for a season, her face hardening and her eyes flashing ominously with the stir of a sudden rage. Then, as instantly she softened in self-pity at the failure of her plans, and casting herself impetuously at Joassaf's feet, she threw her arms about him and laid her cheek against his knees.

"Tell him," she said to the interpreter, "that it is not just to send me away. I believed in his god because he told me, and if I do not stay with him how shall I keep my faith? Besides, he has loved me and been a father to me, and I do not want to go away."

"I told you, Joassaf," I said, "that you made a mistake in fathering the girl." The pope bent down

and gently but firmly unclasped the girl's arms until he freed his legs. Then, stepping back to where he gauged the vantage to be safe, he addressed himself to me.

"How shall we get her out?" he asked in helplessness.

"Why not let her stay? She will tidy things better than a man and the baby would be safer with a woman's care."

"It will not do," he answered firmly. "If we accept her, on what plea could we refuse the rest?" The girl saw that I plead for her and turned her appeal to me. But the pope was firm against her staying, and in the end the compromise was made that she should go out from us for the nights, lodging the time in a neighbouring hut, but should have the privilege—and the work—of our abode throughout the day.

In view of what came after, there is little doubt the pope was right. The next day, at his customary call to grace, there were seven maids stood forward, convicted of their sins. The pope counted them over slowly and looked significantly at me, and I thought I caught an ironical suggestion in his eye.

Before he shrived their souls he spoke to them at length and made it plain that our family hearth was full and that they must go out as usual with their crosses to their several homes. All seven received the counsel calmly, though evidently with much chagrin; and for several days no further converts took release from sin.

It may be wrong to dwell so strongly on this motive in the play. There was much of high thinking and good labour in our daily lives in which the women had no interest or part. But all the care with which we

have been bound, all the fear of failure which has weighed upon our souls, has had its end—and its inception—in their interference with our work.

Of the two of us, I personally have been more at ease. The women have not stirred me with their coquetry, and I have not had that joy in their conversion that made the pope yearn for them and rejoice over each saved one as over a rescued child. Perhaps if I were less bound to Joassaf Petrovitch I should have less greatly cared, but it was not good to watch him toil so day by day and see above him hanging always the boding shadow of defeat. Despite the gain in numbers in his sin-washed flock, I saw a sinister increase in opposition among both unregenerate and saved, that in the end could bring but one result. At first this current was a whim and a caprice—the natural resistance of an ignorant mass to the force that strove to move it uncomfortably for its good; but bit by bit I was forced to see that in it there was an opposition born of honest disbelief, and the breath of it was set to blow Joassaf Petrovitch's ships as far as may be from their proper port.

Nikta was still resentful and would not forgive. Shakmut, though silent, thought sourly on the proposed reduction of his wives; and above all, the women generally found in the pope's severity a challenge to the prowess of their sex, and never missed a chance to prove the gravity of his mistake.

The pope himself saw all of this, but did not put a fitting valuation on its force; or else, more like, was over-confident of his own strength. He had been uneasy from the first at the freedom of their thought, and was still shyly restive under their familiar hands

But so strong was his reliance on his own purity of life, that where his heart had gone out he did not always show the wisest reticence in act, and the women misconstrued this softness and in it found new hope.

At first, on seeing it, I called him to account, with no thought but the caution would be welcome at my hand; but the repetition galled him as the days went by and in the end I kept my admonitions to myself, though not so soon but the shadow of them fell between us and obscured the brightness of our previous perfect trust. When his lonely seizures came upon him—the sort that would before have brought him for sympathy to me—he began to sit apart and brood silently on his cares, finding his comfort in the companionship of the foundling dog. The beast grew to be his close associate and friend, and he lavished on it all the tenderness and love he was denied expression of toward the women of his flock.

It is a strange thing to look on, helpless, while such events proceed, and watch them moving as one watches at a play. Each day added to my growing fear and fixed the certainty the end must come; but though I knew the climax was ahead, I had no thought that it would come so soon.

Last night the pope was in his gentlest mood, and after the evening meal we smoked and lingered in the quiet dusk and gossiped as we used to in the older days. The talk ran all the way from Russia to the troubles at the post, and when sleep pressed upon us and we rose to go inside, we had well-nigh traversed all the matter that was in our minds.

"But tell me," I added as a parting word, "is there the perfect satisfaction for you in your work? If it

were given you to do again, would you so surely come?" The pope sighed softly and turned away his face.

"I did not want to come in the beginning," he said simply, "and much about the reality disturbs me to the bottom of my heart. But the call was a duty I could not evade and, if God needs me and finds the thing worth while, I have no way but to continue and try to be content."

The pope's bed was spread in the main room to the front, and I slept in the chamber behind it with the boys. Joassaf and I went into the hut together, and bidding him good-night, I passed through to my own place. The bed was pleasant and the night still and cool, and it was with a sigh of pleasure I laid me down to rest. But somewhat in the season, or more likely the memory of the talk that we had had that evening, weighed on me like a homesickness and kept me wide of sleep.

It was a strange jumble of events that came in procession to me as I lay, and each added to my emptiness of heart. But I think it was of Anna Gregorovna mostly that I thought. It is strange how a woman grows into a man's heart and makes herself so much a part of him that to lack her is to make impossible the full use of his powers. At any rate the recognition of it is disturbing to one who comes to it in his full manhood, after a string of years passed in full confidence in his ability to go alone.

I turned the matter many ways before I went to sleep and it yet swayed my consciousness long after slumber came. It was a mad chase the lady led me and, as is the wont of dreams, one that weighed heavily upon my peace. It is the mark of this disordered state that the thing desired is always just beyond the

reach and yet so close that the next step promises a sure success. It must have been some time that I so wrestled with the burden of my care; but at last the aspect of the trouble changed, and in my dream I stood ranged up before the castle of her heart and knocking at the door of her regard.

So real the semblance of the action was to me that I could hear each time the hollow echo that followed on the stroke. Then the echo took on a vividness for me that was stronger than the thought, and I wakened to the realisation that the noise was not a seeming but something actual and outside my dream. The sound recurred with an unrhythmic steadiness and was so unusual, coming in the night, that I forgot my dreaming and came wide awake to listen to it.

At first it seemed as if blows were being struck upon a bench or floor; and then as if, outside, someone was chopping wood. A sudden rain that had come up with the night was pattering noisily on the roof and served to confuse the sound and make it difficult to place. But at length I located it as coming from the adjoining room, and looking across to it, I caught a gleam of light that shone through the crack beneath the door.

Whatever it might be, the pope was somehow concerned in it, and I got to my feet and moved softly across the room. The door opened without noise, but the caution was unnecessary for the room was empty of all but the pope, and he did not hear me even after I came in. The night lamp on the table had been lit and, while it was nearly burned away, it served to send a shadowy and fitful light throughout the room.

The pope was in his night-clothes as he had come

with a small axe was fashioning something out of wood which, as I approached, he lifted and tried by holding against the door. He glanced around at me as I came nearer but did not stop his work or speak to me. His hands trembled so he could hardly hold the tool and he was consumed by a furious and eager haste.

"What is it, Joassaf," I said. "What are you trying to do?" He went on with the same fierce eagerness and did not turn his head.

"It is a bar," he said huskily, "—a bar to hold the door."

"What dream have you had," I asked in astonishment, "that you are concerned this night to fasten up the door when for so many nights you have slept with it unbarred?" He caught hungrily at the words and paused with the bar still held against the place.

"Was it a dream?" he asked wistfully, and shook his head as if to clear his vision and think the matter out. Then whirling suddenly about, he thrust his hands out to me in a passion of appeal.

"Tell me," he cried, "—you said it was a dream." The block he had been holding dropped unnoticed to the floor, but he did not heed its clatter and stood with every sense alert to catch my answer when it came. As for me, I did not know what to say. There was no reason for me in his sudden madness and I was doubtful what he wanted at my hands. But as it proved, no spoken word was needed, for, without speech, he read the hesitation in my face and with a bitter cry threw up his hands and flung himself down into his old place.

"Too late!" he said. "I knew it was no dream," and bending down he reached for the tool and block

and made as if he would have set his trembling hands to work with them again. I went across to him and threw my arms about him.

"What is it, Joassaf," I asked soothingly. "What has happened to give you such distress?" He threw me off by a sudden movement and shrank away from me against the wall.

"Do not touch me!" he cried hoarsely. "I am not clean!" I had seen him so many times before bound up in the net of his trance-like faith that I thought I understood his present mood.

"Nonsense," I said, taking him again by the arm. "I will see to it that no one comes. Leave this work until to-morrow and come back to bed." He resisted for the moment, but in the end he acquiesced and let me lead him unwillingly away. He was scarcely conscious of my ministrations and talked incessantly in broken words. I guided him to where his bed was set and tried to get him to lie down, but he demurred strenuously and hung back like a frightened child.

"Not there!" he pleaded and shrank away as if it had been an object to be feared. Across the room he found a settle with which he was content, and I sat down beside him there and waited patiently for him to grow more calm.

It was plain to me now that his condition was not one of the absorbed religious possession I had seen him in before, and I made vigorous search among the probabilities to gain the reason why he was so moved. The only clue that was forthcoming was his eager effort to put up the bar. I waited till he was more composed in his manner and talked less to himself, and then I spoke to him.

"Joassaf," I asked, "why did you wish to bar the door? Had there been someone here?" He shivered at the question, but with an effort lifted up his head.

"Yes," he whispered.

"Was it a native?"

"Yes."

"A man or a woman?" I continued, though I guessed what the response would be. He was a long time gathering up his courage, but at length brought himself to speak.

"It was a woman," he said faintly, and turned away his face.

For a while I sat in silence and forebore to probe into his wound. At times a fever of unrest took hold upon him and he paced fiercely up and down the room. But for the most part he was moved to sit close by my side, and I could see that he found comfort in the mere physical contact and was grateful for the warm touch of one whose sympathy was wholly his and on whom his troubled soul could rest.

The light, already dim when I came in, sputtered and flared for want of oil, leaped up, and so went fairly out. But the pope knew not if it were light or dark and had no thought for anything beyond the weight upon his soul. It pained me beyond measure to see him thus oppressed; and his constant sighing, the chill of the approaching dawn, and the monotonous drip of the rain outside upon the roof, conjoined to weight my spirits almost beyond their strength. I groped about until I found one of Joassaf's hands, and drawing it to me, stroked it to make showing of my sympathy and heart. He did not shrink away as he had done before, but as if too tired to make further struggle

for it, let the hand lie listlessly in mine. But the kindness told on him in time, and in the darkness I heard him crying softly to himself.

"You made the woman go away, did you not, Joassaf?" I said, speaking as if no time had elapsed since we had talked before. He was entirely silent, but I felt rather than saw that he nodded an assent.

"Can you not tell me now about it, Joassaf?" I asked persuasively. "Perhaps it will help to share the thing with someone else." He shook his head and made a hasty murmur of dissent.

"Try it," I said. "Surely I can be trusted to understand."

"Not now!" he cried piteously. "I cannot do it now!"

"But if you drove the woman out," I persisted, "why are you so distressed? Her coming might have happened to any man." His excitement at once came back to him and he gripped my hand until I fairly winced.

"Oh yes! Yes!" he assented breathlessly, "but you do not understand. I will tell you, Fedor, I will try to tell you now, and you will understand—you are sure you will understand? I did send her away, Fedor—but at first she would not go! It was a horror to me, her coming, and I fought against her from the start. Oh, it was dreadful!—her coming in the night! And she would not go, Fedor—she laughed when I tried to send her away. I was ashamed that you or anyone else should know, and was afraid to make a noise, and so I bore with her and let her wait!" His excitement had swelled to positive frenzy, and he clung convulsively to my hand with both of his.

"O fool, fool that I was!" he cried in bitterness. "I thought I was strong and she could innocently stay and you would never know." He paused again to gain his breath and brace himself with courage to go on.

"But I was not strong, Fedor—and the woman laughed. I myself do not know how she beguiled me and turned my will aside." His hands let go of mine and went fumbling up along my arms and neck until he got hold of my head. Drawing it down so that my face was close to his, and I could feel his panting breath upon my cheek, he made the effort and went miserably on.

"Let me tell you, Fedor," he breathed rather than spoke. "Bend down and let me tell you in your ear—I did let the woman stay—I thought that I was strong—and I fought against her—oh, I did fight against her, but it was no use! I do not know what came to me—it was like a consuming fire—but God forgot me, Fedor, and I sinned! Do you hear me, Fedor?" he said, unconsciously shaking my head to emphasise his words, while his whisper climbed up almost to a shriek. "Do you hear me? I forgot everything, and I sinned!"

So strong was his despair that, the climax reached, he remained a full moment in the same position, convulsively drawn and set. Then, as the excitement waned, his body relaxed its rigour, his hands dropped limply to his lap, his head fell forward on his breast, and had I not thrown my arm about him he would have slid wholly down upon the floor. But as I had hoped it would be, it was a relief to him to have rid himself by confession of the pitiful burden of his soul, and as the comfort came to him he lay back in my arms with

a sigh of real relief. He was too much exhausted to say more about it for the time, but with the pathetic wish to save such little shreds of reputation as remained to him, he looked up at me in the gray dawning light and with tears in his eyes added with a wistfulness that touched my heart: "But I did remember—afterward—Fedor, and I turned her out!"

CHAPTER XVII

THERE is a sureness born of blind belief that finds no lodgment in the doubting man. Of my own heresies I have been vainly proud and have long stood complacently above self-accusation because of lapses in religious creed. But as I sat by Joassaf Petrovitch in the pitiful loneliness of his despair, and realised how helpless I and all human creatures were to offer him an adequate relief, I believe I would have bartered my wide freedom for the narrow code of faith, if thereby I could have found the sure conviction in me that the thing to urge upon him was to turn for peace to God.

But I could not do it. More than once the impulse started in my brain, but through very honesty halted unspoken on my lips. I could not think but it would be a sacrilege if proffered thus by me.

There is no certainty that he would have found the succour even there, for the waters had gone over him far above his head, and he had small strength—or wish—to buffet for his life. Confession did its part to bring an easement of the bitter load, and the thing once owned to me, he rested on my sympathy, clinging to me eagerly like a forgiven child, and so became less tragic in his grief.

The night paled into whiteness while we sat, warmed swiftly to the brighter sallow of the dawn, and in the quick ebb of its withdrawing left us stranded like alien bits of wreckage upon a shore; and through it all

Joassaf Petrovitch did not stir, but sat in a huddle on his bench and looked out into the future with unseeing eyes.

I heard the boys stir in the other room and, drawing my hand from his, I went through and warned them against disturbing the priest by heedless venture in. Replenishing the fire, I put on water and made him a pot of tea. Armed with this anodyne I went back to him again and sat down by his side.

"Drink this," I said, and handed him the cup. He looked up at me with vacant inquiry as if he had not heard, but he stretched out his hand mechanically and took the proffered drink. It was grateful to him with its warmth and familiar taste, and as its magic began to tingle in his veins even his dejection was not proof against the glow, and he settled himself to a more comfortable position with a sigh of bodily content.

When he was done I took the cup and set it on one side. Then putting my arm about his shoulders I bent above him as he sat.

"How is it, Joassaf," I asked gently. "Are you feeling better now?" He shivered slightly, and when he answered the tears were in his eyes.

"I have no lack for creature comfort," he said sadly. "It is the mind that is not at rest."

"You are foolish," I replied, "to take the thing so much to heart. It might have come to me or anyone."

"I wish I could believe it," he said. His hands went out and seized upon me and he strove to choke back a sob.

"I have no heart to try it," he said thickly. "Oh, Fedor, what are we going to do?" I was touched, not

only by the appeal, but by his inclusion of me as a partner in his guilt.

"That will depend on you," I said. "Did you think to go away?" He looked up timidly.

"Would it be right to stay?"

"Why not?" I answered boldly. "The thing is with us three and not a public tale. So long as it is undiscovered it makes no factor in the choice." A flush of colour came out and spread across his cheeks. and I saw the pathetic dawning of a hope.

"If I only could!" he said softly as if to himself. I pushed my vantage mercilessly for his relief.

"After all, your being here is God's work, not yours, and your only choice in the matter would be that he bade you go." My heart was in my mouth lest he should feel the irony of such an argument from me, but the desire to believe was strong within him and he caught at the thought alone.

"He has not bidden it!" he cried excitedly. "I have had no call to go. God bless you!" he went on tremulously. "In my darkness you have made for me a way." He paused for a moment and I could see the light come back into his dull eyes. He straightened himself and raised his head with something of his old dignity and power.

"I understand it now," he said eagerly. "It is not what I do that counts except as between Him and me. I am but the thing in His hand to do with as He will." He was yielding himself to the old influence of possession, and I felt we were on firmer ground.

"Do not think," he went on with fierce humility, "that I forgive myself or would minimise by one hair's-breadth the enormity of my offence. But that

is one thing and another is what He has given me to do. I shall do it," he promised with conviction—"do it until such time as He shall order me to stop; and God helping me there shall be better work in it that for the moment I forgot."

He did not look at me as he talked, but spoke impersonally as if in public explanation, and I surmised that what he said was an expression of hope for his own bolstering, more than a declaration of sure belief.

I did not answer him and he went on incoherently with his discourse, growing more and more absorbed in the one theme, till at some unmarked stage the point of turning came, and he let himself freely go and slipped slowly from the bench down to his knees. With that his courage mounted to his heart, his head dropped upon his hands, and he began with tears and agony to plead his cause with God.

I knew then that he was in safe hands, and, there being no need for immediate ministration, I got myself up and tiptoed quietly away. I set the boys their meal and turned back our convert maid before she reached the house. My own hunger was not great and was easily appeased. Food for the pope I set aside, and at length when the sun was high, and still he had not come, I went to the door and called him as if for the usual meal.

To my surprise he came with promptness and without a word. He was still white and haggard with the strain of his ordeal, but there was composure in his air, and in his face a certain quality of peace.

I did not question him as he sat down, and the meal passed off almost without a word. When he was done he leaned back in his chair in grateful comfort and let

himself enjoy the relief that he had found. I waited patiently and in the end he spoke of his own accord.

"God willing," he said with dignity, "I shall hold service this day here as before. Go about whatever work you have, and I will rest myself till it is time." I thought the matter over quickly, and it seemed a foolish thing to leave him in the house to fret in solitude so long.

"We are going to the river," I said. "You had better come."

"No," he said promptly, in strong dissent.

"It is best, Joassaf," I urged persuasively. "Sooner or later you must go out, and you will be happier when it is done." He threw up his hands with a pathetic gesture of defeat.

"I will go," he said humbly, and set himself to wait until our preparations were made. But he could not remain still, and after a minute rose and began pacing restlessly up and down the room. The dog barked where it was tied behind the house, and he slipped stealthily out by the back door and went to bend above it with words of interest and love.

Here he remained until, all things being prepared, I called to him to set out. He came through boldly to the entrance door, but there his courage failed him and he stood for a long panicky moment while his eyes searched with reluctant hesitation the open spaces here and there. Then finding strength, he came rapidly across to where we stood and remained with us as we went on in the way. But he kept close to my side and a little in the rear, and from time to time, like a timid child, I felt him clutch me by the sleeve.

The way was comparatively clear, except for children

and old men, and we were half-way through the village before we saw a soul who might make question of our right. But as we came to the turn in the narrow street, a door opened suddenly at our side and two women stepped out into the road. They emerged quietly but abruptly, and seeing us, stopped short in deference to let us pass.

For me they had a salutation of respect; but as their eyes fell on Joassaf Petrovitch, with one movement their looks turned to each other with quick significance. One spoke in an undertone in the native tongue, and then they both looked again at the pope and mischieviously laughed aloud.

At the first glance the pope stopped as if rooted to the spot, and stood with lips pressed together and eyes fixed on vacancy with the air of one trying to recall some weighty thing that has escaped his thought. I saw his cheek whiten as the play progressed, and at the laugh which showed him the thing was out and the exposition of his tragedy at hand, he gave me one look of agony and blind despair, and swinging on his heel, without a word went swiftly back on the road that we had come.

The women watched him till he disappeared from sight, the humour of their mischief dancing in their eyes. Then, recovering themselves, with a return to their wonted stolidity they passed silently by us and went about their way.

I stood for some moments uncertain what to do. There was so grave a menace to the pope's peace of mind in the challenge of the women's eyes, that I felt myself grow warm in thinking of it. Yet it was a nice question whether it would show more kindness to follow

But my heart was too full for him, to leave wide latitude of choice, and giving to the boys the things I carried, I too turned back and hurried after him.

I saw naught of him as I reached the door, nor was there a sign of him in any room. I had not thought to find him gone, and for the moment while I looked, a very panic seized me. Calmer judgment counselled that he was not far away, and passing out by the rear door, I came suddenly upon him.

He had thrown himself on his face upon the ground beside the dog. When I saw him, his head was buried in the animal's shaggy fur and he was crying as if his heart would break. True to its dislike of me, at my approach the dog dragged itself free, rose to its feet in menace and courageously showed its teeth. But it steadily gave ground before my advance, retiring gradually to the extreme end of its tether, at which point of vantage it stood its ground, but punctuated its impliance of distrust with muffled barks of challenge. I stooped to Joassaf Petrovitch and laid my hand upon his arm.

"Joassaf," I said, "this will never do. The thing has got to be met and you must get up and face it like a man." He made no answer but simply shook his head.

"Come," I said, and pulled him by the sleeve. He paid no heed and was utterly inert. Then I essayed another way.

"Joassaf," I suggested, "it is time for the serving woman to come in. Surely you do not want her, knowing, to see you thus distraught." The shaft

told and he gave a shudder of dissent, and then his hand came out at me with a gesture of repulse.

"Go!" he said in a stifled voice. "I will come after to the house." I went as he directed, and scarcely had I entered by the rear, when I heard the front door open and close to, and knew that he had made no loss of time in seeking sanctuary.

I did not disturb him until noon and then only to go in silently and leave him food. All afternoon he made no sound and I, outside, revolved the matter vainly in my mind and strove to find a way to set it right.

It was not an easy thing to do. The pope had come to where his will had not the strength to be a certain help, and I could see no other way, unless indeed appeal could be addressed to the one among the natives most concerned. In furtherance of this plan I waited, after setting down his evening meal, and ventured once again on speech.

"Joassaf," I said, "which of the women was it that came in?" The shadows were so deep I could not see his face, and he was so long in answer I feared he would not speak at all.

"I do not know," he said faintly. "She came and went in the darkness and I could not tell."

It was the last straw to the load of my distress, and I felt my courage drop down like a stone. I had not known how much I had staked upon this last cast of the die. Without another word, I went back to my place and ate my meal and smoked my pipe in a dead gloominess of despair. Think as I would, there seemed no other way but that the pope must own to his defeat, and leave his work, and go; and all night long there went as a current in my dreams the wear of heart it would

cost to start him on the way. By dawn I was as worn a man as he, and when, as happened, the solution came, I scarce had heart to seize and act upon it.

About two hours before noon, as I sat in the sunshine of the rear door, I heard a sound of shouting that grew louder and drew near. There was a thunderous thumping on our entrance door and then a voice, in Russian; called me by my name. At the same time the pope came hastily out from the room in front and, passing through, shut himself up in the small closet beyond.

My heart jumped, for I was nervous with the strain, and it is a strange thing in a wilderness to be thus called for in one's native tongue. I got up hastily and passed through the house. The clamour still continued at the door, and opening it abruptly, I came face to face with Peter Nicolaievitch with his arm raised up to strike again upon the wood. He gave a great shout on seeing me, and in another moment we were in each other's arms.

"So you are yet alive!" he cried joyously and kissed me smartly on both cheeks. "The natives said you were here, but when I did not find you, I feared that they had lied. And the priest," he continued excitedly, "is he still with you and of the same mad mind? By all the rules you should have the whole tribe Christian by this time." I drew him into the house and gave him something both to eat and drink.

"Joassaf Petrovitch is alive and well," I said. "He is not here just now, but you shall surely see him when he comes."

"Is he content?" he asked with earnestness.

"He has made forty converts since he came."

"So," he said absently, looking the room around from wall to wall. "You are not so badly settled in this house." Then with his old drollery he burst out:

"The shoes! By the shirts of the saints, I had nigh forgot the shoes! Was there any sort of female that could wear them in this place?"

"Yes," I responded. "But with this reservation—that she wears them round her neck." He burst into a roar of laughter, but almost as suddenly came back to gravity again.

"I had hoped," he said, "the place had palled upon the priest, for the commander is full set to have him back again." I felt my pulse quicken with the hope he held out.

"Perhaps the thing may be more easy than you think," I said; and then I told him. He did not laugh as I had feared he would, though at the end there was a flash of humour in his eye.

"Poor fellow!" he said with kindly gravity. "It is always the innocent who find temptation strongest at their heels." Then shaking his head with an impulse of mischievous whimsicality, he added: "God help us simple men!"

"But you?" I said—"what business brings you here?"

"You and the plague," he answered promptly. "There was no doctor at the post, and when the sickness fell and men began to die in batches, the whole post yearned so for you that we had to come to bring you back."

"There has been sickness then?"

"A hog's share," he answered cheerfully. "Well

nigh a third of us are dead." I felt myself grow cold with a sudden fear.

"Were there any among them that I knew?"

"None but the old lady from the great house itself; but a string of settlers ravelled and let go, and outside the wall the natives died like sheep."

"I have never seen a great and sudden scourge," I said. "It goes against me that I was not there."

"Have no such worry," he answered cheerily, "you'll be there yet before the thing is done." I was not altogether pleased with his assurance that he or Baranof had but to turn and call to me and I would come.

"I am not so sure of that," I said with coldness. "This missionary work is fairly to my taste." Peter Nicolaievitch laughed aloud.

"Wait till the commander adds his word," he said. "The invitation does not come from me alone."

"I shall surely wait," I rejoined stubbornly, "until he brings it to me here himself." He laughed again.

"Then sweep and garnish things without delay, for he will be here before you have time to smooth your face." The announcement took me wholly by surprise.

"Alexander Andreievitch!" I cried. "He is here?"

"Yes, I left him doing ceremonies with the native chief; but you will see him here as soon as he can come." I felt my face flush up with the surprise, and for a space I had no word to say. But I pulled myself together that he might not see, and all I said to him in answer was:

"All right. I shall be ready when he comes."

But when he came and we were alone together in the room, it was another thing. The composure I had

thought to show him melted like mist beneath the keen glance of his searching eyes, and I stood before him as confused as any boy.

"Fedor Kirilovitch," he said coldly, "you have made me a long journey because you were quick to take offence." It was a new thought to me that I and not he was in the wrong in that which had been done, and his assumption took away my breath.

"For God's sake!" I cried, "what more did you expect me to wait for at your hand?"

"At my hand!" he echoed. "At my hand! There is the whole keynote to the mistake. Because I, personally, make you an affront, you shut your eyes to all that calls you in your world and run away because you cannot live with me. Did I not tell you when you came to Alaska," he went on sternly, "that it is not I or any other man, but just the Company that counts? When I had you punished I was drunk; and that fact took away the right from you to hold me for it, except personally as a man. Alexander Andreievitch drunk and Alexander Andreievitch sober are two different things. It is only when I am myself that I am commander of the post."

"But how could I know——" I began angrily, but he broke in upon my words.

"Why did you not wait to see?" he demanded. "And then you would have known. There is no man at the post that can say that afterward, when sober, I have failed to make good to him the smallest wrong I did to him while drunk. But you—you were hot-headed, and you could not wait. You went away without a thought of any but yourself, and left to chance the men and women whose very lives depended on your

skill. But I tell you, man," he cried, and his voice rose so that he fairly thundered through the words, "in your position the going was a wrong—a crime—a thing so grievous men have died of it!"

"There were none sick to need me when I went away," I retorted sullenly, "and you yourself in my place would have shrunk to stay and face that evil-thinking crowd."

"Not so fast," he said more quietly. "Let us think this matter out. You have had lashes on your back that I have no doubt stung most bitterly both your body and your pride. But what about me who had to face this same crowd with your mark upon my face? You are a hard hitter, Fedor Kirilovitch, and I assure you the colour of it did not vanish in a day. And yet I did not go away; and further, do you think it an easy thing for me to lay aside my pride and make this journey here to follow you? If I had been of your sort I would have let the whole post rot before attempting it. But my people needed you and I need you, and so I laid aside my own dislike and made the pilgrimage to ask you to come back." His face had softened as he went along, and when he finished he was speaking gently and there was a look of honest kindness in his eyes. I had been disconcerted by his earnestness and by the unusual view of the matter that he took, but in spite of my irritation my heart warmed toward him for the greatness of his soul.

"I had not thought of it as you put it," I said confusedly. "I will take a little time to think about it, but you can depend upon me to do what is right." He looked at me still more kindly and his voice took on an almost pleading tone.

"Decide it now," he said with much earnestness. "What is there to be gained by taking time?" He leaned across the table as he spoke and laid his hand on mine.

"Let me add one more word," he said, "and this time not as the commander but as a man. When you first came to Sitka, you were sent to me as one whom I could welcome and depend upon as a son. I loved you when I first saw you, for your father's sake, and you will look far into my treatment of you to find anything that was not fair, until that last unfortunate mistake—and that occurred because you took me when I was not myself. I am determined to be plain with you, and it is a measure of my esteem that I forget my pride and talk to you in this way of these things." He paused for a moment, and it was plain to see that it was not easy for him to speak, although he had made up his mind.

"It is a weakness," he went on hesitatingly, "that I should ever drink too much; but, God knows, the provocation for me is not small! It is thirty years that I have lived here in this barren place. Yet you who have lived here only these few months can bear me witness how void the life is of everything that makes men want to live. There are times when the black despair so settles on me that I would almost rather die than try to fight. In the best of times it is only the work that makes it worth while to go on. When that fails, the liquor helps me, and sometimes I go too far. But drunk or sober, there has been no time that my heart has not gone out to you as if you were my own son. I held no malice toward you, once I was myself. The blow was one I might have struck, if I that night

had been in your place, and there I am willing to make an end of it. I need you personally and in the work, and I beg you, both to come back with me freely to the post, and to forgive me in your heart as if you truly were my son."

There was ever in Alexander Baranof the silver quality of speech that won the unwilling over to his wish. I do not easily forget a wrong; but as he took me to his confidence and thus laid bare to me his heart, involuntarily, I felt my grievance slipping from me as he talked and the spirit moved me strongly to go as he desired. Besides, the thing he asked for fitted wholly to my plan, and making virtue of my heart's desire, I rose and said to him:

"I am content to lose no time in answer. If you wish it I will go."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE detail of departure occupied small time. The choice once made, I set about the task of making ready with almost feverish haste. My first anxiety had been about the pope, and in a few words I told to Baranof the story of his fall.

"I had heard something of it from the chief," he said gravely. "The priest is more honest than I thought."

"He must come with us. I could not think to go and leave him here alone."

"He will not stay," said Baranof, with strong decision. "But if worse comes to worst, mine is the stronger power."

He was shrewdly right about Joassaf Petrovitch's state of mind. To my surprise he made no strong objection, but seized upon the going quite as a relief. His sole insistence was that he might take with him his dog. To this the commander consented with a shrug.

"I have gone too far in owning what I want," he said, "to haggle now about a kopeck in the price. But what bond of sympathy has grown between the man and beast that he should stand so strongly against its loss?"

"This," I returned, "that the beast, among his converts, is the only one whose eye he can now look into without dread. From the dog he can accept affection and know it is for himself alone."

Before we went, however, I found the opportunity to tell to Baranof all that I knew concerning the visit of the messengers of the rival company and the compact with the chief that they had made. He roared like a baited animal and got excitedly to his feet.

"You are sure?" he cried.

"I saw the parchment and the presents that they gave."

"Ah!" he exclaimed indignantly, "I will go and see Shakmut myself. He did not tell me this before." The interview must have been a stormy one; for when Baranof returned he had the paper, and Shakmut walked behind him responding to his every look like a whipped dog. The commander was still grim, but his anger had given way to triumphant satisfaction.

"You were right," he said quietly. "I have the written proof. It was a long journey to this place, but I would forgive you for making me take it for this, if for no other reason, that the knowledge of Lebedef's treachery is so essential to my own success. It might have passed me if I had not come."

The house was soon dismantled and our goods within the packs. An hour sufficed to clear the place and in another we were on the road. Had there been need to wake up in me a hatred for the life that we had led, it came with the first move toward getting back to my own kind. I never knew before how sweet a bare companionship could be, though perhaps the thrill was greater that the future held for me the promise of a warmer welcome from a woman's face and hand.

However that might be, I found no rest till we were on the way. I cannot now remember that I once

looked backward at the house in leaving it. But so far as expression goes, among the natives there was as little of regret. They watched us from a distance but made no move to help us with our work. And when we went, all but a few remained phlegmatically aloof and made no show either of kindly or unkindly mind.

Of them all there was but one who nursed a real grief. The serving-maid was frankly troubled and found our going very near her heart. She followed us about while we made ready, with sad and wistful eyes; and dumbly made it plain her soul found pain in our abandonment. But that we sent her back she would have followed us, and the last thing we saw as we went up the hill was her drooping figure standing in the way, at watch to see us to the very end.

Yet of the journey there is little to relate. Beyond two happenings that it brought to me, it had no features different from the first. One of these incidents was the talk I had with Peter Nicolaievitch as we walked there in the woods; and the second came as a surprise to me when we were in the boat.

It is not unnatural, too, that I should have yearned for fuller tidings of Anna Gregorovna and the people of her life; but so far, the presence of the commander and the hurry of the start had stood between me and the goal of my desire. But when the haste was over and we were strung out in the forest in the slow plodding of the way, I found my chance to question Peter Nicolaievitch on the things that were in my mind.

"Alexei Yegorovitch?" he said in answer. "He is alive and fairly well. He still has trouble with his throat, but I keep him in at night and with the brandy he comes on fairly well."

"Then he is with you in the barracks still?" Peter Nicolaievitch looked at me out of the corner of his eye.

"He is not married yet," he said cautiously, "if that is what you mean." It was the news I had most hoped to hear, but somehow when it came, the vagueness of it failed to bring me peace.

"Why has it been delayed?" I said, hiding my discomposure as fully as I might. He was not quick to answer, and when he did it was with a shrug that shifted all responsibility.

"Because he is a fool," he said shortly, "and is not certain what he wants."

"Then the lady is still willing?" He gave a sardonic laugh.

"The lady!" he repeated. "Both ladies. The man's liking for them is of such equal strength he cannot find the heart for giving either up."

"But surely Anna Gregorovna does not know——"

"That is true," he admitted, "though she might if she had any eyes."

"Is it then a thing of general report?"

"No. Alexei is too careful in the main. But it is certain the commander understands."

"How do you know?"

"Well, from his air and look when Alexei and Marfa are together in a place; and he has warned the young man that no trespassing will be allowed."

"Are you sure that this is so?" I demanded excitedly.

"Yes," said Peter Nicolaievitch positively, "and in doing it Alexander Andreievitch upset the fat altogether into the fire. Alexei had turned back to his first love again and would have married her if let alone. But

when the commander told him he must stick to her and let the other go, he was sure he wanted Marfa more than he ever had before."

"And what will be the outcome, do you think?" I ventured.

"Trouble, my son," he declared lightly. "But for whom, as yet, the good God has not made it entirely plain."

"But what do you think——"

"I don't think," he interrupted with impatience. "I am fond of the whole lot and do not want to think. I shall be mourner at the burial of whichever of them comes to grief."

He quickened his pace as he finished with his speech and, forging ahead, began to chat with the man in front of me. I saw that the subject was distasteful to him and made no further effort to draw him out. But the matter lingered with me till it became a steady undercurrent in my thoughts.

I found the knowledge helpful, too, in meeting, later, the confidence that came to me from Baranof. The commander was not a man generous in demonstration, but from the moment of my giving in, in allegiance to his plan, there was a something in his manner that made me feel he always had my interest at heart. But with it, too, I came to have the belief that there was something that he wished to say to me, and for which he felt the time was not yet wholly ripe.

It was not till the last day when we were together in the stern of the great boat that it came to him to speak. We had been silent for some time, and when he spoke it was in abrupt break of the topic that had gone before.

"Fedor Kirilovitch," he said, lowering his voice so

that the natives near us could not hear, "there are certain things that must be told you before you get to land. You will remember that when we talked back yonder in the hut, I said to you that I myself had need of you as well as the people of the post. I have waited until this time to tell you in what way, because I wanted you to make decision without thought of me; and until you did so, I could not ask you to be active in my personal affairs." He stopped for a moment as if uncertain how best to begin. Then turning on me the full glance of his compelling eyes, he said abruptly:

"You know that I have a daughter."

"Yes," I said.

"I am in trouble about her," he continued. "She is not rightly well, and I do not know what to do." The news stirred me to immediate interest, not only because I had a warm remembrance of Marfa Alexandrovna as a kindly friend, but also because I thought perhaps I had some inkling of the cause from which her sickness came.

"I am sorry indeed to hear it," I replied. "Is it the prevailing illness, like the rest?"

"No, it is not that, though she has given much time to the nursing of the sick. Her ailment runs less to the body than to the mind."

"How does it act?" I said, though I guessed the truth and could have told the symptoms as I spoke.

"I cannot fully say," he said with hesitation. "But she has lost her lightness and is moody and distressed, and I can see her growing thinner every day. It is perhaps because I can see no sure disease," he added vaguely, "that I find cause to be so much disturbed."

In my heart I pitied him, but for all that I could not keep a question from my lips.

"Has she perchance had trouble of some sort that might have served to bring to her unrest?" He looked at me with a quick glance of suspicion and surprise, and waited for a moment before making a reply.

"To some extent, perhaps," he answered slowly, and then paused. I made no sign to interrupt him and, after turning the matter in his mind, he went on with a deprecatory shrug.

"I must be frank in the matter with you, I suppose, if you are to undertake a cure. There has been no trouble otherwise than this. Marfa Ekaterina became interested in a man to whom I would have been glad to have her go. I found him dallying and inclined to wait, and loath to give her certain promise of his plans. I did not say he should not have the girl, but I made it clear to him that he must make up his mind. What good has come of it I do not know; but I suspect the thing is near her heart." He stopped abruptly and I saw that he was through.

"It is enough," I said, "to answer for her state; but such a sickness rarely comes to kill. How long it still will go I cannot say until I see the girl; but be assured, once we are ashore, I will look into it."

"Good!" he said with a quick look of pleasure. "And whatever the outcome I will not forget. And now," he went on, "as to the other thing concerning which I wish to speak. It is a weightier charge and one that touches both the Company and me. You will remember that even when you first arrived in Sitka I was disturbed about the settlement that Lebedef had built above up on the Sound. His people were insolent

then, and I have found them growing bolder every day. Scarcely a trapper or hunter of us has been spared, and within a month they have come down to the river and taken a cache of fish. You yourself have brought me word of their treachery here. But worst of all, I have one of them firmly inside my walls. They know our plans as they could never else, and almost daily I have missed things from my private desk." His face darkened and he set his teeth with rage.

"I cannot reach them!" he cried helplessly. "The devils know and watch me, and besides myself there is no one I can surely trust. But enough of that," he continued, swallowing his rage and turning again to me. "It is in this, Fedor Kirilovitch, that you can help me if you will. I can make talk of that which will certainly set them on. There will be no knowledge of your coming back, and the trap rightly set, I have the thought you might surprise them." I have small patience with a waiting part. It frets my soul to sit and trust to chance to come to me. But there was that in Alexander Andreievitch's persuasive talk that set the ordinary scruples far behind, and led by the answering tingle in my pulse I took short time in falling in upon his mood.

"I will do it if you think it best," I said impulsively. "But knowing that you sent for me, shall not I too be watched?"

"I was sure that you would help me," he said quietly. "So sure, the thing is all arranged. They do not know that I have sent for you and they will not find that you have come."

Three hours from Sitka there was a trapper's post. It was a landing only and a few scattered huts, but

by the shore there was a great stack of rough dried skins brought down for us to carry to the warehouse at the post.

I saw more plainly then what Baranof had planned to do. By his command I went ashore with him, and leaving Peter Nicolaievitch in charge of the counting and embarking of the pelts, he set out with me for the homeward run in another and a smaller boat. He trusted the discretion of no other man, but took the oar and paddled the skin vessel for himself.

"It will be a day at least," he said, "before they can come in, and for that time our opportunity is laid."

The saints were with us when we went ashore. A mist had fallen and the moon was young and scarcely gave a light. The beach was empty, and only once were we put to flight by meeting anyone upon the way. At the great door I waited while Alexander Andreievitch reconnoitred silently within. Then at his touch I followed him noiselessly through the darkness of the great hallway and across the larger room, and so came to the alcove where he had his private place.

"Wait here," he said, and pushed me into a smaller space beyond, of which till now I had never taken note. I heard a door shut to upon me, and Baranof's retreating steps. Then there was a noise as he banged heavily the great door in pretence of new coming in, and I heard his step go up the staircase to the floor above. Almost immediately he came back, accompanied by a woman with a lamp. He sat down at the desk and told the woman where to place the light.

"I shall be busy writing for an hour," he said. "You had better bring me my supper here." The woman

made a courtesy in assent and then went quietly away.

Baranof waited till she was out of sight, then rose and came across to me. I was in a large closet or clothes-room built into the wall. The door, as is usual in such places, was constructed in two parts, so that while the lower section was closed to, the upper might remain ajar and thus let in the air. A dusty curtain drawn across the top served to conceal my head; and yet with caution as I stood behind, I could command most of the room without, while in the shadow I remained unseen. Baranof brought me in a chair and made me comfortable as might be.

"After dinner you may smoke," he said, "if you are careful not to show a light. There is the smell of tobacco always in these rooms."

We divided the meal between us like two boys, and Alexander Andreievitch was in high good-humour at the prospect of success. He talked and lingered under the pretence of his work, until the evening was all but passed, and it was not till the lights were out and he was gone that the greatness of the task before me began to weigh upon my mind.

There is no silence for the man who is alone. The night provides the stimulus to stir each nervous sense in turn, and waiting in the darkness, a hundred times strange noises made me sure that what I looked for was about to come. I listened breathless over and again and braced myself for some strange happening; but each alarm went by with promise unfulfilled, and with them all no single thing occurred.

When the real crisis came it was in a way all foreign to my thought. It must have been within an hour of

twelve when I became conscious of a rhythmic movement overhead, as of some one walking on the floor above. At first I listened to it with attent and waited eagerly what things should come of it. But the noise went on and on in tireless iteration until it became unconsciously a habit in my thought and I no longer remained clearly conscious of it.

When I did remember it again, it was with the sudden certainty that it had stopped there up above; and listening for it I heard the pattering echo coming from the stairs. It came down confidently to the lower hall and in its nearness sounded more distinct. My heart began to jump with excitement, and I held my breath lest by some ill-timed move I should fright away success.

The suspense was over in a moment, for almost at once the shadows began to dance across the floor, there was a rustle of garments in the doorway, and a woman carrying a lamp came hurriedly into the room.

She did not seem like one afraid of watching, but walked boldly, though without extra noise. Turning, she swung to the door but did not latch it, and then crossing the room set down the lamp on one of the little tables near the western wall.

Beyond the table was a window, its shutters fastened like the rest. These she undid, and set the boards apart, for just a moment standing to look out into the night. Then she turned back into the room and, throwing back the wrap that was about her head, gave me the first clear vision of her face. It was Marfa Alexandrovna, and going to the table she moved the lamp so that its light would fall across the narrow opening in the shutters she had made. After listening

intently for a moment she turned away from the place and began to walk nervously up and down the room.

I followed her intently while my head went round. Her coming was a shock to me, both because I could not believe it was she whom I had been set to watch, and because the creature I saw before me was such a pitiable travesty of the woman as I had seen her last.

She was thin almost to emaciation and sunken about the eyes. She held herself with her old pride of carriage, but there was slowness of movement even in her poise as if she had lost the elasticity of youth. Perhaps the most striking change showed in her face, which even in the dim light was altered from her old habit of animated interest to an air of settled melancholy and calm. It took no vigorous effort of the mind to bring the certainty how strongly grief had worked upon her health, and while the thing was painful to the heart, I was glad to have the chance to study her unobserved.

But as I watched her she stopped suddenly where she walked, and bent her head toward the door as if she caught some sound that had not come to me. Evidently it was an interruption she did not expect, for she tiptoed silently over to the doorway and stood with her fingers on her lips listening as if in doubt.

I, too, now caught the sound and made certain that some one was coming down the stairs. Marfa Alexandrovna remained where she was till the door opened and made no effort to conceal herself or escape. It is probable she recognised a familiar sound in the approaching step, for after the first stir of the surprise she did not appear disturbed, and when the intruder entered she remained quietly looking at her and did not

say a word. I think perhaps I was more disturbed than she. My heart thumped against my ribs and I felt my pulses leap within my veins, for I recognised the new-comer as she did and saw that it was Anna Gregorovna who had come in.

She was dressed in a loose habit for the night, and her hair hung down about her neck. She had some sort of knitted shoes upon her feet, and a shawl was drawn about her shoulders as a guard against the cooler evening air. She went straight to Marfa Alexandrovna and took hold of her with both hands.

"Is it another sleepless night, dear?" she said with kind solicitude. "I heard you walking and found no peace till I had come." The creole did not repulse her though she showed small satisfaction in the proffered help.

"I am sorry I disturbed you," she answered slowly. "I had no idea you were awake."

"There was no trouble in it," returned Anna Gregorovna quickly, "except in that it made me sad for you. But come," she said, and drew the creole with her to a seat near the commander's desk. "You must not walk here by yourself. Sit down comfortably and talk with me and perhaps the thing will pass." Marfa Alexandrovna gave a quick look at the lamp and shutter and so round the room; but she did not resist, and seated herself on the bench without question or reply. Anna Gregorovna sat down beside her and took her hand in both of hers.

"What is it, Marfa?" she said entreatingly. "What is it that hangs so heavy on your mind?"

"It is no weight," returned the creole passively. "It is simply that I am not well."

"No," persisted the other, "there is something more than that. Tell me what it is, dear. It will help you just to share the thing with some one else." Marfa Alexandrovna did not at once reply. Her eye wandered stealthily to the open window and then came back to Anna Gregorovna's face in ironical dismay.

"It is not always safe to ask for confidences," she said slowly. "The sharing is a tax upon the heart, and I would not want to make you as unhappy as I myself am now." Anna Gregorovna drew the creole to her and held her closer while she spoke.

"You have been so good to me," she said simply, "that I cannot but be unhappy when things go wrong with you. Tell me if you can, and if it makes it easier for you I shall not mind the pain." Marfa Alexandrovna's eyes filled with tears and she bent and kissed her companion on the hair.

"I will not spoil your happiness," she said absently. Then recollecting herself, she turned on Anna Gregorovna with a sudden question.

"Anna, you are really happy, are you not?" The girl looked up at her in some surprise.

"Why, yes," she said, "except as I am worried about you."

"But you have health and hope and a promise to look forward to," continued the creole almost fiercely. "The promise of a lover——" she hesitated a moment before finishing the phrase—"a lover who has told you you were dearer to him than all the world." Anna Gregorovna looked at her as if she did not understand.

"What would come to you," went on Marfa Alexandrovna, without waiting for a reply, "if after having had these things they should suddenly be swept away?"

"I cannot think it," said Anna Gregorovna quickly. "But surely it is not so bad with you as that?" Marfa Alexandrovna laughed nervously and slowly shook her head.

"Oh, no! it is not all gone. But I lack so much that you and other women have that the world has a taste of bitter to my mouth."

"I do not understand. Your father is good to you and loves you, and so far as I can see there is not a man in the post but would make you the dear promises like mine, if only he could think that you would care."

"No, not a man," repeated Marfa Alexandrovna scornfully. "And not one of them with the courage to keep the promise after it is made." Anna Gregorovna gave a cry of protest.

"You are not just," she said impetuously. "Not all men who make promises to women break them in that way."

"You mean when they are made to women like you," said Marfa Alexandrovna drearily. "But I am different, and it is not the same. Do you not know that I am a creole and only in part of Russian blood?" She pushed Anna Gregorovna from her and sat up bolt erect.

"Oh, the shame of it!" she cried, her lips trembling with her scorn. "My mother was a good woman and honest, but because her blood was of a different sort, I must be declared a thing apart. I can love and be loved like other women. But there at the edge of happiness the division comes, and no man of my father's race can take me to him honestly according to the law!" Anna Gregorovna made no effort to draw her down again, but looked at her with sympathetic eyes.

"Surely," she said, "the man who loves you is not base enough to scorn you for your Indian blood." Marfa's face changed and with a shamefaced look at Anna Gregorovna she let her eyes drop to the floor.

"I was wrong to say he was not true," she said softly. "There were other things besides. He loves me. I am sure of it, and if I would go to him he would take me as I am."

"Then why do you feel so bitterly about it all?" The perversion born of her long brooding on the affair, or else some strange distortion of her mind, held Marfa Alexandrovna as if in fascination to the further dissection of her feelings with the woman she had wronged.

"Because it is not right that I should go. Would you marry the man you loved if you thought it would bring him shame? If it were to be here always in this land I would not wait until to-morrow night. But he is a young man and I believe will rise. And what would happen when he was called back across the seas? You know how they would look upon me there; and even if I did not lose his love, could I bear it, do you think, to know that I was a drag upon his life? Oh!" she cried, throwing out both hands with a gesture of disgust, "I am sick of the whole thing!" Anna Gregorovna moved swiftly over and put both arms about Marfa Alexandrovna's neck.

"Forgive me," she said entreatingly. "I think I understand it now. When I think how much more has come to me than to you I am ashamed that it is mine. Believe me, if I could I would give you a full share in all my happiness." With a sibilant indrawing of the breath Marfa Alexandrovna pushed her sharply back.

"I want a part of no man's love," she said fiercely. "I will have everything or none at all!"

"And yet when one has offered all of it you say you are going to give him up." The creole's face flushed, and I could see that the strain was wearing on her self-control.

"I do not know," she said coolly. "I have not yet made up my mind."

"But," said Anna Gregorovna, "you yourself have told me that he cannot marry you under the law." The creole laughed and threw out her hands with the same gesture of contemptuous despair.

"What do I owe the law," she said bitterly, "that I should set aside my happiness at its demand!"

"But, Marfa!" Anna gasped in horror. "You do not mean——"

"I do not know what I mean," returned the other dully. "Perhaps I am not sure that I can trust myself."

"Oh! Oh!" cried the younger girl. "You could not! I cannot believe it!" Marfa Alexandrovna shrugged her shoulders and looked Anna Gregorovna defiantly in the face.

"It is my happiness," she said doggedly and turned herself away. Anna Gregorovna was beside her in a moment.

"Tell me you do not mean it!" she entreated. "I cannot believe that you have ever done an evil thing." Marfa Alexandrovna looked down at her for some moments as if debating with herself how far she might dare to go.

"I am glad of your good opinion," she said slowly, "but I am no more perfect than the rest."

Then, with an abruptness that was like her father's, she addressed herself to the younger girl, speaking faster and with an evident desire to impress.

"What if I should tell you," she said, "that I deceived you to-night when I let you think that I was here alone because I could not sleep. What if I should say that I came—as I have come before—to meet the man who has my happiness in his hand and that I am to see him here to-night?"

Anna Gregorovna heard her through with a surprise that held her rooted to her place. She sat like one bewildered and there could be read upon her face incredulity that slowly changed to the pain of full belief. The tears came into her eyes, and when she spoke it was with a troubled entreaty as if she were pleading with a wilful child.

"Marfa," she said—and her voice was almost a whisper—"tell me—you have not—yet——" Her own eyes fell, but Marfa Alexandrovna's did not waver in their honest gaze.

"No," said the creole simply, "not yet. I told you I had not made up my mind."

While they spoke a clock somewhere in the house struck sharply, and went booming slowly on its way to twelve. The sound startled Marfa Alexandrovna into activity, and she got quickly to her feet.

"Go," she cried hurriedly. "He will be here now before you are upstairs." She pushed Anna Gregorovna to the door as if to help her to a quicker going, but the girl hung back and made an attempt to speak.

"No! No!" she gasped, "you must not meet with him to-night. You are not yourself, and I will not go and leave you here alone."

"You must," commanded Marfa Alexandrovna. "I will not have you here. You have no choice!"

"I will not," cried the other stubbornly. "If I did I could not answer to myself or God." Marfa Alexandrovna's excitement grew from nervousness to quick alarm. She looked from Anna Gregorovna to the window as if under a spell, and from commanding came down humbly to plead.

"Anna," she begged, "there is no time to show you how important it is that I should meet him here alone. There is no danger for me in being with him now. I will promise you anything if you will only go. To-morrow—some time—I will tell you all. If you have any love or care for me," she went on wildly, wringing her hands and speaking so fast that the words fell over each other in her haste, "if you have any thought for your own happiness or self-respect, you will go at once without question, and leave me here alone to meet with him to-night."

Anna Gregorovna was plainly stirred by the appeal, but she shook her head mournfully and made no move to go. She began to cry softly to herself, and her whole body shook as if with sudden chill.

"I must not," she cried with decision. "I have made up my mind. I will not leave you here with him alone!"

There was a sudden gasp from Marfa Alexandrovna and I saw the shutter move. Like a miracle, the tension of the crisis brought back her self-control; and with a stoical shrug of the shoulders she came back to her usual calm.

"Too late!" she said quietly; and then turning to the girl, "stay if you will; but remember that I warned you—and your blood be on your own head!"

Neither one spoke again, and I watched with absorbing interest the opening of the blind. It was only for a moment, for almost immediately behind the shutter appeared the figure of a man as he came lightly across the sill. He made absolutely no noise, but once in the room the light blinded him for the instant and he stood shading his eyes with his hand and looking under it around the place.

Anna Gregorovna recognised him as I did, and gave a stifled cry of horror and alarm. It was Alexei Yegorovitch, as I had expected, and as I looked back from him to her I saw that Marfa Alexandrovna had taken her advantage and fled from the apartment, and that Alexei Yegorovitch and Anna Gregorovna stood facing each other there alone.

CHAPTER XIX

THERE is a point in anguish that is outside of speech. and in the shock of their strange meeting both Alexei Yegorovitch and Anna Gregorovna compassed it. With him there was the realisation that the frame of falsehoods he had for months been building up was in the moment shaken down about his feet. With her the swift out-running of the whole spring flood of hope and happiness that for so long had been buoying up her life.

After the first look of open-mouthed amaze the man gave backward toward the window and in his face the red spread upward like a flame. Anna Gregorovna was too stirred to move, but stood where she had been, with her head forward and her eyes fixed on him with a steady stare of astonishment and unbelief.

"Is it you, Alexei?" she said, and her voice had in it as much of anger as of grief. "Is it really you?"

He did not answer and hung down his head. She swayed dizzily in her place and, chancing on a chair, drew it to her mechanically and sat down. For a space that seemed interminable she remained looking at him with the same intent gaze of grievous challenge, until at length the full truth came to her how she had been betrayed; and, shivering slightly, she covered her face with her hands and began to cry softly to herself.

The discomfiture of Alexei Yegorovitch was still too great to trust itself to words. In the beginning he

had braced himself in anticipation of an outburst from Anna Gregorovna of bitterness and wrath; and when none came he found within him no weapon fitted to defend him against the gentle helplessness of her despair.

He stood his ground to give her chance for accusation; but when she hid her face and did not seem to wish to challenge him, he changed his mind and, turning, made as if he would again go out by the way that he had come. But Anna Gregorovna was not thus content to see him go. The meagre noise he made in moving rallied her, and she raised up her head.

"Wait," she commanded, and beckoned with her hand. He obeyed her meekly and came back to her again in the ring of brighter light.

"Is it true, Alexei," she said searchingly, "that it was to meet with Marfa Alexandrovna that you came here to-night?" He was an honest man if not a constant one, and he would not lie to her even to save her from this pain.

"Yes, it is true," he said, but did not look at her. She gave a little sobbing catch of the breath.

"What have I done," she cried, "that you should treat me in this way?" Her forlornness touched him as nothing else could have done, and he gave a quick step forward, stirred by the accustomed impulse to take her in his arms. Some finer instinct in him stayed him in the act and he remained leaned out to her, moved and unhappy but without the sanction to touch her where she sat.

"Anna," he said, and his voice had in it an ill-concealed note of humiliation, "in all the time that we have been together, have I ever either by failure of

service or by active deed brought you to feel that I have been unkind?" She did not answer, and he took her silence to imply dissent.

"And since you came to Sitka have you ever had to think that I rued my promise to make you my wife?" She still was silent, though she faintly shook her head. He paused uncomfortably, not finding it an easy matter to go on.

"You have been good to me," he faltered, "so good that just to think of it makes me bitterly ashamed; and whatever you may be thinking of me now I cannot bear that you should feel that I would wittingly make for you either trouble or distress."

"Alexei," she said, cutting the Gordian knot and going at once to the weak point in his defence. "Do you, indeed, love Marfa Alexandrovna so that but for her holding back you would take her now to be your wife instead of me?"

"I shall never marry Marfa Alexandrovna," he returned doggedly, "and you ought to know that I have surely thought to marry you."

"But do you love her?" she persisted mercilessly.

"Yes, before God, I do!" he burst out suddenly. "But that is a thing you have no right to ask. What is it to you if I should find her altogether sweet, since that I make you first and turn away from her to come to you?"

"There is this right," she answered quickly, a blaze of anger rising in her eyes. "I will have no question now or afterward which of us two shall have your love. I will be the whole, Alexei, or I will not be anything at all."

It was a matter of astonishment to me that wishing as

he did honourably to be free the man did not sharply cut the bond now that the knife was ready to his hand. But in his vacillating mind some foolish thread of pride held back the willingness to own himself as wrong; and further I could see that as the chance of losing Anna Gregorovna rose clearly in his view, her worth grew larger to him at each pricking fear.

"Surely," he said, "you know you have been first. When have you had a reason for a doubt?"

"This one at least, that you came here to-night to meet with Marfa Baranof. Why did you come?" He had no answer ready, and she herself went on.

"Shall I tell you why?" she said scornfully. "It is because you thought to hold us both at once. It may be true that I have been first in your heart, Alexei, but part of it at least has gone to Marfa Baranof, and I have never had the whole." He did not attempt to gainsay her in her accusation, and after waiting impatiently for him for a moment, she went on:

"It is true, you see. That is why I have the right. You can have her, Alexei, or you can have me, but you cannot have us both."

"Well," he said finally, "what do you want me to do?" She stopped sobbing and lifted up her face.

"There is nothing to do now, Alexei. It is all done." Then, stirred by some sudden impulse of her wrong, she covered her face again and cried out through her close-pressed hands, "Oh, it is hard! Why could you not have loved me as you said?"

"I do love you," he cried passionately, and came quickly up to where she sat.

"Anna," he pleaded, and his voice showed that for the moment at least he believed each sentence that he

spoke, "surely, you cannot think of me as wholly bad. You will not deny that you have thought I cared. Even if I have done wrong in meeting Marfa here, I can explain the matter and show that there was a reason for it all. And whatever may have been my dereliction, you must see that I love you now and have no thought for anyone but you!" But she was not to be beguiled by his intensity, and showed no sign of being pacified by what he urged.

"I cannot believe one thing you say!" she burst out bitterly. "You tell me this to-night and to-morrow you will say the same to Marfa Baranof."

"Anna," he declared with the most intense conviction, "never since you came out to me here at Sitka have I expected to make Marfa Baranof my wife."

"I could hate you for that," she retorted angrily, "for if you did not, you have held her as something worse." Alexei Yegorovitch straightened himself and involuntarily bowed his head.

"Marfa Alexandrovna is a good woman," he said almost with reverence. "I have never had an evil thought about her in my life."

"How could you help it when you planned to take her, knowing that you could not marry her honestly under the law?"

"It is not true," he asserted indignantly. "Why do you slander her in this way?"

"It is true," she repeated with vehemence, "for Marfa Alexandrovna herself so owned to me here to-night."

"Marfa Alexandrovna?"

"Yes, Marfa Alexandrovna! She told me she had made up her mind to go to you in this way!"

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He still had in his manner the deference of his last thought of Baranof's daughter, and now leaned forward toward Anna Gregorovna with an air of astonished incredulity and unbelief.

"Did she say that?" he demanded wonderingly.

"She did." He stood considering, and as he caught the full meaning of the thing, his rare smile broke out for a moment on his face.

"God bless her!" he said under his breath; yet not so softly but Anna Gregorovna heard.

"You do love her!" she cried wildly, springing to her feet. "I have never been the first!" He came back to himself in a moment, but it was too late.

"Go," she said convulsively. "I never want to see you again!" He turned to her and strove insistently to make her listen to his pleas.

"I will not go," he said stoutly, "until you promise me that you will let me come to you again and show you all the truth. We have been too near together to have you let me fall away from you unheard. I have some right in this as well as you and you shall not be so bitterly unfair to me." She listened to him patiently, but did not relent.

"I do not know," she said. "I cannot promise anything to-night."

"Oh, you are hard!" he cried feelingly. She resented the imputation and her anger grew.

"I may be hard but I am honest," she said significantly, "and I will not say that which I do not mean." He laughed inconsequently and drew up his shoulders in a shrug.

"Very well," he said. "Then it only remains to me to go. Good-bye." He held out his hand to her in

hands behind her in her gown.

"Not to-night," she said forbiddingly. "It will be time, Alexei, when I know that it is clean." He laughed again nervously, bowed to her profoundly, and walked slowly away to the window across the room. Through it all he kept the utmost dignity of poise and, at the last, he turned with another profound courtesy, straightened himself, passed through the window, and was gone.

Anna Gregorovna remained where she was till it was certain he was really away. But this once sure, the strong reaction came, and she went swiftly to the bench where she had sat with Marfa Alexandrovna, and throwing herself upon it with her head on a table near at hand, poured out her grief in a great flood of tears.

It is given to some men never to play the fool, but I have no conviction I am one of them. So long as Marfa Alexandrovna and Alexei Yegorovitch were on the scene, there came to me no prompting, unasked, to interfere. It was like a fantastic play at which it was my privilege to sit and watch, and I had found no qualms in waiting to see it played out to the very end.

But when the two were gone and Anna Gregorovna was before me in the desolate abandon of her grief, it fairly took the fortitude that I possessed to keep me back from going to her in her need. A dozen times I made the initial move and then found sense to fight the impulse back.

There could have been but one way for me in the end, if chance had not arranged to thwart me in the desperate foolishness. In my uneasy stir, an arm struck

The sound was startling, coming in the night, and Anna Gregorovna could not help but hear it. She raised her head sharply and listened for the noise, while her look went searchingly into the shadows in swift challenge of its cause. My heart was beating so it did not seem that she could fail to hear it and so find me out; but after a moment's wait she reassured herself and settled back again to her despair.

But the homely interruption had served unconsciously to loosen the high tension of her grief and made her more alive to bodily discomforts and distress. It was not long before she stirred uneasily and sighed aloud; and in the end got up from where she sat, shook out her dress, took up the lamp which had begun to flicker and burn low, and raising it as a guide above her head, passed from the room and softly behind her closed the door.

With her went out the whole excitement of the night. I waited long for the light-fingered soul who, if our plans were right, should come to glean in this forbidden field; but all the hours there was no sound or sight of him to show him certainly a thing of flesh. It may be Baranof's plans were not well laid or, better, that the noise and troubles of the night had served to frighten him.

But be that as it may, I made no prisoner and saw no theft, but sitting there idly in the quiet dark, I found full time to meditate on what had gone before. I did not find the waiting hard to bear. I had found discomfort in the sight of Anna Gregorovna's grief, and there still flamed within me a dull blaze of resentment

against the man who had brought her to this pass. But, stronger than both these pains, there leaped in my whole blood the exultant certainty that the end had come in the affairs of Alexei Yegorovitch and Anna Gregorovna, and that the outcome had been all that I could wish in furtherance of my own desires.

No less disquieting was the problem how much of all these things should be disclosed to Baranof. It was in his interest I had been set to watch; and while the thing discovered had nothing to do with Lebedef or Company affairs, it did, in a way, affect his peace of mind and so made lien on my responsibility.

Then, too, I much disliked to think of facing Baranof with any but clear eyes. His trust in me had been entire, and he deserved that in no point I should evade or be uncandid with him. On the other hand, though, I could not see what good could come to him from being told, and there was no knowing what harm might issue to the lovers' plans, should he at hearing be wrongly moved to interfere.

The more I thought about this last, the less I found myself inclined to tell; and when the morning came and with it Baranof, I had digested the matter fully in my mind and made my vow that he should never know.

He came in briskly, smiling, and with a quick glance around the room. His eyes were alight, and he spoke with the certainty of assured success.

"Well, who was it?" he said impatiently.

"There has been no attempt," I answered slowly, striving so far as in me lay to appear rightly unconcerned. The light went suddenly out of Baranof's eyes, and his jaws set together with a snap. His eye-

lids narrowed to a line, and he looked at me with searching suspicion.

"You are sure?" he said from between his teeth.

"Yes, I am sure."

"And you have watched here without failing all night long?"

"Yes, I have not left this closet for a moment since you went away." Baranof's eyes went from me for another quick look around the room, and he laughed with the air of one who has caught his adversary napping and is about to push his vantage home.

"If that is true," he said slowly, "how does it come that the shutter yonder is unbarred?" The catch was so complete that I had no word to answer him. I stood in helpless silence, oppressed not only by the cloud of decent shame that blinded my own eyes, but also by the sense of keen reproach I saw in his. Baranof's face flushed in temper, and I braced myself for the expected explosion of his wrath. But he held himself strongly, and when he spoke it was with a spirit of wistful curiosity rather than one of unreasoning rage.

"Are all men alike," he demanded bitterly, "or is there some rare lack in me that no man—not even the one I trust and call my friend—will tell me the truth?"

"I have not lied to you, Alexander Andreievitch," I answered, trying to be calm. "I said there had been no attempt, and that is true."

"Then there was some one here?"

"Yes, but it was neither a robber nor a spy."

"Why did you not say so at the first?" he objected fretfully. "I had a right to the entire truth."

"Because, in my judgment, it was better both for you and others that I should not tell. I will tell you

now if you command it, but the meeting was not an affair of state, but of the heart."

"Ah! a love affair!" he ejaculated softly, and stood looking straight ahead, while he weighed swiftly in his mind who the offending personages might be. It did not take him long, however, to ferret out the truth, and turning back to me with searching questioning, he said abruptly:

"Which of the two was it that let the lieutenant in?"

"They were both here," I answered, "but Anna Gregorovna talked with him alone."

"Tell me the whole, man!" he burst out impatiently. "Can you not see that I have got to know?"

Beginning with the first coming of Marfa Alexandrovna, I related to him the full happenings of the night. He listened with attention, but with slight comment or remark. When I spoke of Marfa Ekaterina's bitterness at finding herself outside the law, he sibilantly drew in his breath.

"So they have stung her with that poison, have they?" he said absently. "I will soon put an end to that."

At the narrative of Marfa's flight and the surprise of Alexei Yegorovitch in finding Anna Gregorovna in her stead, his face set in a grim smile of satisfaction.

"Not so bad," he murmured. "I should have liked to see the thing myself." But it was when I came to the reflection on Marfa Alexandrovna's honour that he uncorked the vials of his wrath. He stood licking his lips while I set the matter out, the blaze of his anger growing steadily in his eyes.

"That is enough," he said finally, stopping me before

I had come to the end. "Come, we will look for the young man."

"What are you going to do?" I asked fearfully.

"What is there to do," he answered heatedly, "except just one thing? I am going to kill him as sure as I am a man!" He turned to start upon his task of justice, but before he had gone a yard I had him by the arm.

"You fool!" I said. "Do you want to spoil the only chance of happiness Marfa Ekaterina still has? Can you not see that since Alexei Yegorovitch has quarrelled with Anna Gregorovna, he will surely wish to make Marfa Ekaterina his wife?"

"It is not that," he roared. "It is my own honour that is touched!"

"Be calm," I urged. "What would it count with you if you should salve your honour, if thereby you made for her a sorrow that would be lifelong?"

"She is too good for him. He does not deserve to have her for a wife!"

"But she loves him as you know, and from what I guess of her condition, if she should lose him, I would not answer for her life." He frowned and fumed, but would not give it up.

"Let me go," he said roughly and wrested his arm from my grasp. He made no motion to go on with his plan, but turned directly across the room to a cupboard in the wall which he opened with a key. From this he took a brandy bottle and a glass, and pouring out a generous portion, drank it at a draught. The liquor quieted him and he came back to me with more of his usual calm.

"Come out," he said, "and make yourself known. I have no further heart for this spying business. God

knows what we would get if we tried it a second time. Let it keep till another day. Go to the archimandrite's house, not the barracks, for your place. I have had it made ready for you and for the priest. Settle yourself and get about your work as you can."

"And you," I ventured, my heart in my mouth, "will you let the lieutenant go?" He hesitated a moment before answering.

"For the moment, yes," he said soberly. "But beyond that I will not say. He has attempted my own flesh and blood, and I will never forgive him so long as we both shall live."

CHAPTER XX

It was a thoughtful thing in Alexander Baranof so to arrange for Joassaf Petrovitch that he should have a place apart. No prop for courage could have seemed more sure to the old man than the certainty that there was for him a final sanctuary to which at will he could retire. In the barracks he could not at any time have felt he was alone. But in the archimandrite's house his room was sacred to him, and when the door was closed he could strip off the pretence and lay bare his soul without a fear of prying intervention.

The great boat was quicker in coming than we thought, and he and Peter Nicolaievitch landed from it on the afternoon of the first day. It had been a scant twelve hours and twelve since I had seen the pope, but in his quick homecoming I found a thrill that longer absence could not have made more keen. It pleased him, too, to find me waiting for him, and scarcely was he ashore than he had me in his arms.

"How is it, Joassaf," I said, "has everything gone well?" His eyes still had the timid look that had become a habit with him during his troubles of the past few weeks, and even as he held me I saw his glance go furtively from face to face among the crowd in fear of derisive recognition.

"It is good to see you again," he murmured, and tightened his arms about me with a hug, "and the place is like home with so many faces that I know. But,

Fedor," he said, bending till his mouth was fairly against my ear, "I trust there has been no whisper of our trouble at the post."

"No, not the faintest sound," I answered promptly. "There is no reason why you should not wholly be at peace." He sighed contentedly, and disengaged himself from my embrace, and with a dash of his old self-possession set about overseeing the landing of his baggage and his dog.

When the house was reached he entered into its possession with all the importance of a child. He planned the stowing of his goods, and assigned to me the chamber he thought best fitted to my needs; and in the safety and freedom of the new life, threw off for the first time the incubus of care that for so long had been a weight upon his soul.

"I shall not try to fill the archimandrite's shoes," he
'd humbly, "for not only do my cassock and my
ing render me unfit, but I am an old man now and
ıt half the care for rank I have for peace. But
there is no other priest in Sitka I will minister
le here, and do for them as if they were
pleased me to find him thus content in
ough I had yet the haunting fear he
wanted to be sure he was through
before had taken him afield, and
ed with his homily, I said:
ou find enough of them here
ked at me searchingly, as
he did not answer to the
and after a moment's

bly. "I am not

so sure of vision as I was. God has given me a lesson, Fedor, I shall not soon forget, and I have come—oh, with bitterness, have come!—to know that it will not do to be too certain of myself."

From the moment of his arrival neither I nor Joassaf Petrovitch found free time for looking back. The plague still held a senile grip on both Malemutes and whites, and in more than one house of the post we found unburied dead. All that night and the next day we laboured side by side, and it was full afternoon again before I had checked the final tally of my sick and he had shrived his last penitent.

When the round was made, and we were slowly walking back to the house which we called home, for the first time since I returned to the post I found the time to think of other things. My heart went down, and I felt go from me the exultant uplift that had come to me from being again among my kind. Much of it no doubt was due to weariness and the strain of being so long near to misery and death. But aside from this I found a keen depression in the contemplation of the way that things had shaped themselves around me at the post. It was a special cause for grievance that I had got no intercourse with any of the men and women whose presence there had made it seem worth while to journey backward to the place.

But Peter Nicolaievitch and Alexei Yegorovitch were both busy with their daily work. Marfa Alexandrovna made virtue of her illness to remain concealed. Anna Gregorovna too, elected to work out her problem in the quiet of her own room, and Alexander Andreievitch had sunk into one of his fits of spleen and gone into retirement with his bottle, to brood upon his wrongs

and drink himself so far as might be toward forgetfulness.

I might have forced myself on Marfa Alexandrovna by virtue of my craft; but she of all of them had suffered most, and I did not find it in my heart to flush her from her cover when she desired peace. It was Anna Gregorovna of course that I yearned the most to see. My heart was full of her and her pleasant ways, and while—as in the pope's case—I had set myself positively on record as having no belief in God-appointed tasks, yet down in my heart I found the sure conviction that Providence had constituted me a special messenger to comfort her and bring her tidings of good cheer.

My long absence furnished full excuse for formal visitation, and almost on the heels of the thought I found myself looking up at the sun in calculation whether or no there would be time to set my clothes aright and go to her before the dinner hour. And so looking I was sufficiently absorbed that I did not see the blind boy, Paul Alexandrovitch, there before me, until I was quite upon him in the way.

He was with a serving-maid who had in her more or less of native blood. She had checked him so that he should wait to let us pass, and now held him by the sleeve, while he strained forward impatiently, pushing out his head that no sound of our coming should escape his ear.

"Who is it, Masha, that you should hold me back?" he demanded. "Is it some one that I do not know?" I went forward to him at once, and took his hand in mine. Some fancy moved me not to speak my name, but wait to test his recollection and see if he would know. His other hand came quickly to the one I

held, and as when he had seen me first, he ran his fingers lightly over mine.

"I know you," he cried with a little shout of joy. "It is Fedor Kirilovitch, who let me touch the cow. I did touch her, did I not, Fedor Kirilovitch, though Anna Gregorovna said I was afraid."

"You were a brave boy," I answered, "and I am glad to see that you remember what I said. But where are you going, and how does it happen that this one is with you now?"

"Masha? Because Marfa is sick, and Anna Gregorovna is in her room asleep, and there was no one else to bring me, when it was time for me to go out into the air."

"Where are you going now?" I said again.

"You shall go with me," he cried, dancing up and down in his delight. "We are going to the warehouse to see them put in the skins. I like to hear the men sing and the noise as they throw the bundles from hand to hand."

"I have never heard them," I said. "This is the first time since I have been here that they have put in the skins."

"Then come with me," he urged, "and we will see together how it is done." I thought the matter over quickly. If Anna Gregorovna was asleep, as Paul had said, I should not want to waken her without a cause, and if I yielded to the child's desire, I might have chance for speech with Alexei Yegorovitch or Peter Nicolaievitch himself.

"I will go," I answered, "if you will show me the way." He clapped his hands delightedly together.

"Good!" he said. "I will. I know the way."

Then turning to the maid he ran to her and gave her a little push.

"You may go now, Masha," he said peremptorily. "I shall not need you any more." The woman laughed and held him back.

"But the calf," she said. "You were going to see the calf." Paul Alexandrovitch paused uncertainly and turned his face to me.

"There is a calf, Fedor Kirilovitch," he said irresolutely, "a calf that has just been born."

"Can we not see it before we go to the warehouse?" I suggested. "I think there will be time." The boy's face cleared at once.

"Fedor Kirilovitch will show me the calf, Masha," he said, with dismissal in his tone. "And after all it is better I should go there with a man." The woman was both fond of the child and accustomed to his whims; for without further question she bent and kissed him on the forehead, and with a courtesy to me went quickly away.

I took the boy by the hand and set briskly out for the meadow near the stables where we had before seen the cow. The pope, who had been a sympathetic listener to our talk, fell in behind and came along with us. The child was full of what he was to see, and chattered on without a break for answer. But I was not so bound up in my thought, and at the first view of the animals we had come to see, I made sure that something with them was amiss.

Two yards had been constructed in the open space so that the two animals might be close together and yet held apart. In one there was a commotion in which it was not easy to distinguish forms, and in the other the

cow ran wildly up and down along the fence, vainly endeavouring to break through the bars, and lowing frantically in her anxiety.

"Take care of the boy," I said to Joassaf Petrovitch; and letting go his hand I ran with all my speed across the field. The tragedy was over before I reached the spot, for when I was near enough to look into the yard the calf had ceased to struggle and lay upon its side, and a good-sized dog was shaking it and tearing at its throat.

I shouted at the beast as I came up, and climbed the fence as quickly as I could. But so engrossed was it in its bloody work that it was not until I kicked it soundly in the ribs that it came back to itself and let the little creature go. For an instant its blood-fierceness held, and it turned upon me with a growl and vicious show of teeth. Then, as with all cowards, its prudence came upon it with a rush, and with a parting snap at my legs as it went by, it bolted away across the inclosure, crawled through a hole where the palings had not been driven close, and disappeared. There was something familiar in the manner of its attack, and I turned to follow it more closely with my eyes; and so standing, almost at once I heard the voice of Paul Alexandrovitch in excited call.

"What is it, Fedor Kirilovitch? What is the matter?" he cried in his high, shrill voice. "Come at once and let us in." Joassaf Petrovitch must have run with him, for they already stood close against the fence. The priest undid the fastenings of the gate, and brought the child to where I stood. He was breathing hard with the exercise and excitement, and took hold of me with both his hands.

"What was it, Fedor Kirilovitch?" he repeated imploringly. "Why did you have to run?"

"It was to save the calf," I answered. "It was being attacked by a dog."

"Where is it?" he demanded. "Was it very badly hurt?"

"I am afraid it was. It is lying in front of you, at your feet." He stooped down and put his hand on the little animal, which now lay entirely still.

"Poor thing," he said. "And did you see what dog it was that did it?"

"No," I returned. "It ran away too fast." But as I spoke I chanced to glance at Joassaf Petrovitch, and there was on his face so strange a look of shame and guilt that like a flash it came to me why there had seemed something familiar in the dog's last onslaught on my legs, and I knew that I had missed the truth when I said I did not know to whom the beast belonged. I looked at the pope with searching inquiry.

"Was it a usual lapse for a convert," I said in a low voice, "or did he experience a change of heart?" He blushed to the eyes like a conscious girl and answered to the spirit of my question rather than the words.

"Oh, no! no!" he murmured brokenly. "It could not be. He would not do it! Besides he was tethered strongly with a rope."

"You had better be sure of that before they make a search."

"I will," he said eagerly, "though I do not believe it. I will go at once." I watched with sympathy his retreating figure until he was well out of sight, and then turned round again to the stooping child. He was talking to the stricken animal in low tones and passing

his hand lightly over it here and there. But as he moved along the little creature's neck his fingers chanced into the gash torn in its skin that had been made by the teeth of the dog. The touch of the blood was unpleasant to him, and with a shudder he wiped his hand hastily upon the dryer hair and got quickly to his feet.

"Come," he said. "I do not like this animal any more. Let us go somewhere else."

"But," I urged, "what is the matter with it? A little while ago, you were anxious to come."

"It is dead," he said with a shiver of distaste.

"But it will not hurt you dead, any more than it would alive."

"I know it," he answered, "but it is different. Come, let us go away." There was nothing further to be done, so I yielded to his whim, and we set out for the warehouse in accordance with our original plan. The child was sobered by the accident and did not talk, and it was not until our destination was fairly reached that he regained his natural buoyancy of poise.

The storehouse for the furs was, next to the great house where the commander lived, the largest building in the post. Just now the level at its front was strewn with the flattened, compact packages of skins that waited to be sorted out and carried to their final place within the walls. Each bale on coming from the boat had had its water dip and, exposed for two days to the hot summer sun, both thongs and covers were shrunken hard and stiff.

A line of men ran from the piles to the wide-open doors and passed the bales from hand to hand of one another with a steady rhythmic motion. Inside, the scene

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was musical and sweet, but that differed from the first in being some notes higher in the scale. The third man was as far as I could see, but by the cries that came with perfect regularity, though varying up and down like a rude round or chant, there was no doubt about the progress of the bale back to its final resting-place upon the pile.

There was a fascination about the activity and tirelessness of these human ants, and I stood with the boy just inside the door, holding him tightly by the hand, and watching the strange scene with all my eyes. Paul Alexandrovitch danced up and down and pulled determinedly against restraint.

"Do you not hear them, Fedor Kirilovitch?" he cried excitedly. "Do you not hear them sing?" It was in my mind to stoop and answer him, but at that moment I saw his father, Alexander Baranof, standing in the crowd, and the sight of him for the moment put the child completely from my mind.

Alexander Andreievitch had his place between the centre and the right-hand doors, so that while he himself was in shadow he had a view of all that was going on around. His hands were in his pockets, and he leaned lightly against the wall. There was that in his manner and the forward poise of his head which confirmed me in the belief that he had drunk too much and was not thoroughly himself.

But the thing which seized my attention and held me in its thrall was the strange and sinister expression of his face. He did not seem to see us or the men that worked about him on each side. He stood there perfectly absorbed, with his eyes fixed on the point where the central ladders had been set, and on his

countenance there was a look of hate so bitter and malignant that in the dim light he seemed more like an evil spirit than a man.

My eyes instinctively went out in question along the direction of his glance, and following came to rest on the figure of a man who stood at the ladder's foot and seemed in certain measure in command. He was stripped to his shirt and pantaloons on account of the stifling heat, and his head turned continuously from side to side in watchful observation of the work as it went on. Nothing escaped the supervision of his eye, and his recognition continually found expression in words of approval and command. At the same time with automatic regularity as each man passed him on the way, he set over from one hand to the other a small, smooth bit of stone, and thus kept certain tally on the number of bales.

His dress and manner were so different that he was unfamiliar at first sight, but in a moment, in spite of his dishevelled look and the streaks of dirt upon his neck and face, I recognised him as the Lieutenant Sookin and understood why the commander stood and stared at him with such dislike.

It was a strenuous problem that I had to face. Alexei Yegorovitch had no knowledge that Baranof had solved the riddle of his double love, and so was unprepared against attack. On the other hand, I had seen the commander in this mood before and knew that any sudden spark would fan a blaze that in its swift upleap would scorch them both.

My first thought was to go to Alexei Yegorovitch and under cover of our greeting put him on his guard. But my heart told me that Baranof in his present

suspicious mind would take no time in seeing through the trick, and, comprehending, might be moved at once to all I would avoid.

Therefore I changed my plan and nerved myself to beard the lion where he stood. For the moment there did not come to me a plausible excuse for breaking in upon his thought, but while I cast about, debating in my mind, there came a full diversion that changed the aspect of the whole affair and cleared the matter once for all.

The workers on the central stack had set their layer quite across the top and now were busy with the rows immediately along the central aisle. They were more swift than those on either side and worked at racing speed to finish first. Their chant had quickened almost to a tune and the slower men among them were at pains, with certainty, to take and pass the bales.

Finally, the man at the head of the ladder caught up and threw his bale a hair's-breadth sooner than its proper time. The second man was taken unawares. He turned from throwing his own bale and met the other without chance to guard. It struck him fairly in the chest and bowled him over like an alley pin.

At other points it would have done no harm; but here the worker was so near the edge that, falling on his back, he found no way to save himself, though he scrambled frantically and caught at each side with his hands. A moment he hung on the edge and then, half rolling round, slipped over and came down.

He turned in the air with his arms and feet bent under like a cat, and half-way down fell squarely across the brace that held two stanchions at this point, so that I thought he was safe. But the beam was only

wedged between the posts, and the sudden blow dislodged it, so that both it and the man came clattering down together to the floor. The interruption served to break the fellow's fall, and when he struck the floor he leapt to his feet and ran wildly out and by us and did not stop until he was well outside the door.

The men at work had met the case before and knew the danger that might come. The instant of the fall there was a shrill cry of warning from the nearest man, that was taken up and carried on till it came from all about the place; and like an avalanche the men upon the stacks came running with a rush and with shouts and curses swarmed down the ladders like a living flood.

As I looked I saw the reason for their haste. The prop removed, the walls of the aisle behind it began to stir and bulge, and the posts on either side like closing fingers moved slowly together at the top. Baranof saw it too and planned an instant move.

"Steady!" he called, his big voice sounding high above the noise. "Get in there quickly, and put back that prop!" The men were too demoralised by their sudden fright to respond at once, and with a rush he went forward and smote Alexei Yegorovitch on the back.

"Are you a coward?" he cried, "that you are afraid to do your duty and go in?" It was so suicidal a thing to ask a man to do that Alexei Yegorovitch turned on him in blank astonishment. But in the act he paused and swung quickly back to look intently down the aisle. He saw there something that we did not see, for with a nod of his head to Baranof and one of his rare smiles, he said:

"All right, I will go," and with a leap passed in between the quickly narrowing walls. Involuntarily I put out my hand to hold him back, and even Baranof made as if he would have stopped him if he could.

To my surprise, Alexei Yegorovitch when he reached it made no effort to take up the prop, but stepping nimbly over it passed on beyond it at full speed along the aisle. No other followed him and we stood, breathless, watching the narrowing space. There was no burst of sound or sudden shock; but after a time that seemed interminable, there was a puff of dust and the two walls settled down together with a sudden little rush.

So gentle was it that for the moment its grim significance all but passed us by. I myself felt no more than that Alexei Yegorovitch had passed through to somewhere before the closing of a door. Baranof was the first to see the truth.

"Come back," he called to the frightened crowd. "There is no danger now. Back to your places there on either side and throw these bales out till the aisle is clear." The men obeyed him readily without a word; and he and I and such as could be used made frantic haste to move the bales in front passing them back to those who carried them to the open air.

What brought the thought back I shall never know. But while I worked thus madly with the rest, the sudden memory seized me that I had forgotten my charge. With a wild fear I stood upright and gripped Baranof by the arm.

"The child!" I cried. "What has become of the child?"

"What child?" he roared. "Stand back and get

go his arm. He paid no further heed, and I stood free to seek the blind boy where and how I would. I ran up and down the passage, searching every nook, and scoured the field without at sides and front, but found no trace of him. Somehow there continually came back to me with haunting force that last strange look of Alexei Yegorovitch and the unexplained mystery of his flight along the aisle. But thinking did not help it and at length in sheer despair I came back to the work of clearing out the bales, trying to nurse the hope that the boy had gone away and yet with the sinking feeling always at my heart that in the mêlée he had come to harm.

It was two hours before we cleared the passage back to where the braces held, and just before the end we came upon the lieutenant, and, under him, as I had feared, the boy. In the excitement of seeing his father in the place, I had forgotten him and let go his hand. He had used his freedom to his own great hurt, and wandering into the centre aisle had passed beyond the break before the falling of the man.

The lieutenant saw him when the crisis came, and found in his need the stimulus to act which Baranof's taunt had failed to wake in him. It was plain his plan had been to snatch the child and carry him to safety out at the other end. But there had been no time, and at the last he had laid the child close down against the wall and bridged himself above him to save him from the pressure of the falling bales.

The blind boy was senseless but not dead, and Alexander Andreievitch with infinite tenderness and care lifted him in his arms and carried him hurriedly

outside to the light. We turned the lieutenant over on his back. I felt his pulse and put my head against his breast; but there was no response of consciousness and his heart had ceased to beat. His arms and legs were broken with the strain and from the corners of his lips had run a scarlet stream. Had he been a man of stronger build he might have still pulled through. There was but a light weight of bales above him and he was almost into safety when he fell. But he was not made for things like this, and the exertion alone was enough to start the bleeding from his lungs.

But it was a splendid death, and the men who lifted him uncovered reverently before they took him out. I went before them to the door and came on Alexander Baranof coming back.

"Can you not come to the boy?" he asked me anxiously. Then with a realising look at the slower troupe behind, he said softly, "And is he dead?"

"Yes," I answered with some bitterness. "I trust you are satisfied with your revenge." He threw up his hand in eager deprecation.

"No! no! He was a brave man," he said soberly, "I did not like him, I admit. But when I gave that order, it was solely to bring him to his duty in the case, and before God I had no thought to send him to his death."

CHAPTER XXI

It is a strange change death brings to a face. They say it is a man's soul that looks out through his eyes, and it may be this we miss when it is gone. I had known Alexei Yegorovitch so that in the dark I could call up his face; but when we carried out the body to the light, the look of him was such he might have been another than himself, and I saw him with a real sense of shock.

There was no strange distortion nor trace of mar or bruise. When I had wiped away the stain of blood about the lips there was no sign to show how he had died. But the play of thought, the lighting of the eyes, the rare illuminating smile that stirred the lips, had all vanished with his life and the blind mask that looked at me was unfamiliar to me in its set repose. I know I shrank from it and was glad when the men lifted him and carried him away.

The child still lay unconscious with I knew not what inward hurt. There seemed no immediate danger of his growing worse, and after arranging for his removal and his care, I betook myself to the archimandrite's house to arrange affairs and make needed preparations for the later watch beside his bed.

The pope was waiting for me at the door and drew me with much mystery inside. As soon as we were alone together, he came close to me and, in a dismayed whisper, unburdened to me his care.

tragedy had driven the lesser one that had preceded it entirely from my mind and it was a full minute before his statement touched my consciousness.

"How do you know?" I said at last.

"There was blood on him," he returned solemnly, "and his chaps were red."

"What have you done with him—killed him?"

"Oh, no," he cried in genuine distress, "that would not help. He would not understand. I have him shut up yonder in the room." I shrugged my shoulders and passed on through to my own place. He followed me and while I began my preparations, sat himself down dejectedly upon the bed. He was so stirred by the disgrace which had been brought upon him by the one creature for whom he really cared, that he had no eye for anything beyond.

"I would not worry about the matter," I said consolingly. "Even if you have to give him up, he is only a dog."

"I cannot forgive him," he returned with a grieving simplicity that was like a child's. "It is his ingratitude that hurts. I had trouble enough already without his adding this."

"But, man, he is only a beast."

"I know it," he said with an air of offended dignity, "but I have done enough for him that he ought to have stopped and thought." The assumption was so amusing that I almost laughed, but it took small observation to make plain that the matter was all serious to him. The dog had remained a friend when all the rest of his world had turned away and there had grown up in the man a joy in the relation, as tender as

f the animal had been human and not beast. So I checked the smile that trembled on my lips and listened sympathetically while he went babbling on, complaining of his protégé as a father might of a wayward child. But the thing was too insignificant to hold me against the heavier matters that were on my mind and in the end I grew impatient of his talk.

"You are not alone in being troubled," I said at length. "I too have had an afternoon."

"I knew you would," he answered sympathetically, "for you were certain from the beginning that it was surely he."

"Oh, damn your dog," I said, my patience giving out. "Mine was a real tragedy. Alexei Yegorovitch was killed to-day by the falling of the skins and I saw them take him out from under the pile of bales." The pope looked quickly up at me with shocked and startled face.

"How did it happen?" he demanded breathlessly.

"He sacrificed himself to save the blind boy, Paul."

"Paul?" he repeated after me, "and was he saved?"

"Yes, unless he has some inner hurt." He stood for a moment turning the sudden tidings over in his mind.

"Where are they?" he said at length.

"Alexei was carried to the barracks; the boy they have taken home."

"It is dreadful," he ventured, his former engrossing interest entirely merged in the new care. "Let us go to them. Perhaps we can be of use."

"I was making ready for it," I returned. "I am to watch with the boy to-night."

When I was ready, we sat down to our meal, the pope

out from me the details of Alexei's death. We were for the most part silent as we started on our way, and when we came to the entrance to the barracks the pope fell back and let me lead the way.

I knew the place so well I did not think to make announcement before going in. The great room was deserted and we passed through it without stopping to the chamber in the rear that had been Alexei Yegorovitch's. So it happened on opening the door that we surprised Peter Nicolaievitch sitting dejectedly on the side of the bed on which the lieutenant had been laid.

He got to his feet shamefacedly and turned on us with a manner that was almost fierce. His face softened as he discovered who we were, and he came silently forward and gave to each of us a hand. His eyes were red and the clasp he gave me was so strong it hurt.

"We did what we could for him," he said soberly, "but it was too late." We advanced to where the body lay and Peter Nicolaievitch, as gently and tenderly as if he feared the sleeper might awake, drew back the cloth that covered up the face. I set my teeth involuntarily as he did so, for, at the motion, the dislike I had had when I last saw the lieutenant came back again over me like a wave.

But I might have spared myself the fear, for with the first glance at him, the feeling passed absolutely and for all time away. He was different here in the soft light of the lamp and what I saw had nothing about it to disturb my mind. Peter Nicolaievitch had propped the body up with pillows and the draperies were disposed about him as if he were asleep. The features had

come back to something of their old intelligent estate, and as I looked at him I could not but take note how wonderfully like he looked to the Alexei of the time when he had made his choice between the pope and me, and fainting, furnished me my earliest patient at the post.

The loss was still too fresh with Peter Nicolaievitch and as he stood holding back the cloth, though his face was rigid as a mask, his lips quivered piteously in his effort at self-control.

"I suppose this is a thing that comes to everyone," he said huskily, "but I wish to God it could have been delayed till I was free to leave this Tophet of a place." We thought of no fitting answer, and he bent above the body with a tenderness of manner I had never seen in him before.

"Poor boy," he said, and touched him gently with his hand. Then with a force that was almost roughness he turned and spoke to me.

"Marfa Alexandrovna——" he said, "has she been told?"

"I do not know," I answered. "I had not thought of it."

"Where is she?"

"She has been ill all day and has not left her room."

"I am glad," he said simply. "It would kill her to come upon it unawares." He stood for a moment absorbed in thought, endeavouring to settle the matter satisfactorily in his mind.

"She must hear of it as she should," he said at last decisively, and the pope and I, listening, both answered, "Yes"; but in spite of this full agreement of our minds we were not at peace. I looked at the pope and at

Peter Nicolaievitch, and they looked at each other and at me. We were all equally united in the need of bringing properly to her the dreadful news, but there was no one of us but felt dismay at the thought of being called on personally to carry out the plan.

"I could not do it," Peter Nicolaievitch said between his teeth. The disclaimer was purely an expression of opinion personal to him, but I welcomed and adopted it as my own with a breathing of relief.

"There is but one person, really, who has the right," I answered; "Alexander Andreievitch must do it if it is done at all."

"He may, perhaps, if you ask him," said Peter Nicolaievitch doubtfully, "but he will not want to, he so dreads a woman's tears."

"I have talked to him before of Marfa Alexandrovna, and he is quick to seize on anything that may affect her life or health."

"It is worth trying," said Peter Nicolaievitch, thoughtfully. "She is like him in ways and pride and he cares more for her than for anything else on earth." We walked in silence to the door and, in parting, Peter Nicolaievitch wrung my hand.

"Do not delay," he cautioned. "I should never forgive myself if through our lack the thing should go amiss."

We went directly to the injured boy, and, as I had hoped, we found the commander sitting by the bed. The child had awakened from his enforced trance and was conscious of what passed about him in the room. He was supremely weak, however, and had no wish to stir; but his progress had been good, and I doubted not that in the end he would survive.

Alexander Andreievitch held him gently by the hand and spoke to him now and then in a shadow of his big, accustomed voice, The only sign the blind boy made was a slow movement of the head from side to side, and, at intervals, a whispered calling of his sister's name. So many times did this occur, and the child's desire for her seemed so great, that I made of it my opportunity to question Baranof.

"Marfa Alexandrovna," I said, "why is it she does not come?" He glanced at me with an almost guilty look.

"I have not sent for her," he said slowly. "She has not been told."

"Why not?" I asked. "It surely must be done."

"I know it," he cried protestingly, "but how?"

"It falls to you, Alexander Andreievitch. There is no one else."

"I cannot," he said weakly, "I have not the heart."

"But think what will come to her if she hears it—as she surely will—from some other mouth." He stood irresolutely, with his head bent down and rubbed his foot from side to side upon the floor.

"Were it some one else, I would not care," he said slowly, "but with my own flesh and blood——"

"That is true," I assented, "but to do it will be the real kindness in the end."

"Well, I will try," he said at last. "To-morrow if I can——"

"No," I interrupted, "it must be done to-night." Quite unexpectedly, he raised his head and turned suddenly to me.

"Will you go with me?" he said abruptly.

"Yes," I said, "if you think I can be of use." His

eyes looked his satisfaction and he gave a long sigh of relief.

"And the priest, too," he said. "She was fond of the priest."

"They are good at consolation," I answered, "and I think if you ask him, he will come."

Baranof, having made up his mind, could have no rest until he had the matter done. He called a woman to attend the boy, and, motioning with his head for us to follow, led the way out of the room into the hall and so passed through to the women's side of the house. At a door at the end of the passage, he stopped and knocked.

"Marfa," he called, "it is I. May I come in?" There was a moment's silence and I heard from within the girl's voice say:

"Yes, if you wish it, come." Baranof hesitated a moment with his fingers at his lips. Then with a swift glance at us to brace his courage, he lifted the latch softly and we all passed into the room.

Marfa Alexandrovna was dressed, except that she had let down her hair, and she lay upon a couch near the centre of the place. She was not expecting any except her father to come in, and our intrusion came to her with a sense of shock. She slid her feet off quickly from the bed and sat upright upon its edge.

"You should have warned me," she said to her father, with annoyance in her voice. "I thought you were alone." Baranof was too full of his tidings to pass the matter off, but he made such effort as he could.

"It is Fedor Kirilovitch," he said apologetically. "He has just returned from his journey to the North and I was anxious to have him see you without delay."

She turned her solemn eyes on me in keen interrogation, but she had found something unusual in her father's look or speech, and, without greeting even, her eyes left mine and went back in uneasy questioning to his.

"Is that the only reason?" she asked searchingly.

"Only your health," he said, dropping down his head so as to avoid her eyes. She kept her gaze upon him mercilessly.

"But the priest, then," she said, "why did you bring the priest?" He had no answer ready and her agitation grew, for in his guilty look there was that by which her suspicions were confirmed.

"Why do you not tell me, father?" she continued with such calmness as she could command. At the same time, I could see her body tremble and her eyes grow luminous with the fear of what he might disclose; and as she spoke, she gripped the edge of the bed beside her with her hand. Baranof's face grew flushed with the strain of what he had to tell.

"Marfa," he said wistfully, "I have been a good father to you, have I not?"

"Yes," she said tentatively, devouring him with her eyes.

"And you believe that if I have come between you and anything in this life that you have cared to have, it has been only because I thought it needful for your welfare that I should?" She did not speak in answer nor take away her eyes, but her lips formulated dumbly the motion of assent.

Already in the absorption of their emotion both she and her father had forgot that we were there, and they went on with their dialogue as if they were alone. The girl's Indian blood stood her in good stead in helping

to preserve her calm, though her rigid pose and intense concentration betrayed how strongly she was under strain. Baranof was excited, too, and ill at ease and spoke with an humbleness and gentleness that were a gauge of how tenderly he held her in his heart.

"If I should come to you to-night," he blundered on, "and say to you that there was a great sorrow for you in what I had to tell—if I should bring you word that what you have been hoping for your future and holding dearest in your heart had surely failed and come to wreck because both the man and the chance have gone forever—would you have courage, dear——"

But she could bear the strain no longer and broke in upon his word.

"Father," she said in bitter accusation, getting to her feet and leaning breathlessly out to him in her fear, "what have you done to Alexei Yegorovitch? Where has he gone?"

"God alone knows," he said solemnly, "but I trust he is at peace." Marfa Alexandrovna quailed visibly and drew in her breath in a sob of horror and distress.

"Is he dead?" she whispered.

"Yes," said Alexander Andreievitch, softly, "he was killed this afternoon at the warehouse by the falling of the skins."

She did not speak again, nor find in tears the merciful outlet for her grief. It was as if the blow had taken from her instantly and for all time the power of motion and of speech. Only as the moments passed her eyes grew almost fierce in their dry brightness and her haggard face more drawn; and as the weakness that such excitement brings took hold upon her, she suddenly sat down.

Baranof put out his hand awkwardly, as if to help her and then drew it back. It was plain that however close the understanding was between the two, it did not go to the intimate exchange of sympathy and love.

We all three stood in silence, hoping each moment that the first pang of her loss would pass. But there was no respite for her troubled heart, and almost before we realised it, the agony of her bereavement and the growing weight of her despair wrought their full mischief in her tortured brain and she slipped out and away from us, across the boundary of sanity and hope.

She did not move or speak, but in her face there grew a subtle and unpleasant change, and her eyes began to burn with an intensity that was like a consuming fire. Her fingers which until now had been quiet as she sat, moved nervously out and in and she picked restlessly at her sleeves and dress. Then without warning her hands went swiftly to her throat and rocking back and forward in her place, she began suddenly to laugh.

It was not the laughter that is near to tears nor the mirthless voicing that hysteria prompts. From its low beginning to its high-pitched gibbering close it was sentient with the horror that only madness brings. As it began and swelled to the full measure of its sound, my flesh crept with a shivering chill and I heard the pope behind me say, "Dear God!"

I turned to look at him, but at once looked back, for, in the instant, Baranof, stirred as we were, made a movement toward the excited girl, and, with a scream that drove the colour from our cheeks, she sprang to her feet and crouching like something wild, launched herself directly at his throat.

He caught her in his arms regardless of her cries and made strong fight to seize her by the hands. I was by him almost in the thought, and between us we pinioned the arms of the unfortunate creature to her sides and forced her back again upon the bed. She writhed and moaned and beat out with her hands, but her father kept his place beside her and with his arm around her strove to quiet her with soothing speech. He was breathless with the violence of his exertions and as he talked to her, the tears ran steadily down his face.

"Take heart," I said. "It is not likely this violence will last." He turned his face to me with a despairing motion of his head.

"It is a judgment," he said huskily. "My punishment is great." I knew that for the moment he was not thinking of her, but of his hatred of Alexei Yegorovitch and the indirect part he had played in compassing his death, and I found no word of comfort for him in my heart. The pope was already kneeling at the end of the couch, his calm face lifted up in prayer. I took my station on the other side, and with my fingers on Marfa Alexandrovna's pulse, resigned myself as did the other two, to watch the resolving of her state.

CHAPTER XXII

It is now three months since Alexei Yegorovitch died, and in that time the most of those who suffered in his tragedy have found their healing and come again to peace. For one thing, the summer is over and the nights have darkness of a Christian length. The autumn winds have blown away the vapours of contagion that kept the people sick; and even the settlers, purged of their first homesickness, have taken on more cheerful airs and come to look resignedly on life.

Baranof himself has much to make him glad. Lebedef's settlement on the river has met with final and deserved ruin; and there has never been another year that brought the Company so many skins. And, besides success to gratify his pride, far more than he had hoped, the commander has found salvage from the wreckage of the things that were near his heart.

The blind boy, Paul, in his mishap, met with no vital hurt, and to-day is all that he was before. Marfa Alexandrovna still sits in darkness and is outside of life, but the acute rigour of her malady has been long since stayed, and in her eyes at times there comes the flicker of intelligence that is the first lighting of returning dawn.

It was a somber promise of new happiness that presented itself to Alexander Andreievitch when he began to take up life again in his great empty house. With Marfa gone, and Marya Andreievna dead of the plague,

he looked with melancholy and dismay on its conduct and its care. But, with kindly spirit, Anna Gregorovna threw herself into the breach and made his comfort and his happiness her earnest thought; and so complete has been her ministration that he has come to lean on her as before he did on those of his own blood, and to lavish on her much of the love that Marfa earlier claimed.

The one, perhaps, who looks least happily on life is Joassaf Petrovitch, the pope. He has settled himself in the archimandrite's house and, without assumption of that functionary's dignities, has drawn around him all his cares and work. The militant instinct that drew him afield to battle for the Lord has sunk to a mere smoulder, and for the most part scarcely glows at all.

In truth, I think he looks upon the natives with a reservation that is near distrust. The Kolosh men he tolerates and meets half-way, but the women he cannot yet abide. The Russians of his charge have, without exception, come to love him, and, above all, to respect. It would seem that, of all of us, he has the smallest quarrel with his fate, and should have passed us in the reach of his content.

But it is not what is had, but what is lacking, that is the final measure of the cup, and, though in all things else he seemed to have his wish, the whole horizon has been darkened for him by the losing of his dog. The affair of the calf proved more serious than I had at first surmised. The little animal was the first of its kind the colony had seen and its untimely fate called forth a strict inquiry for its self-appointed executioner. Each man about the post who owned a dog was plied with swift and rigid inquiry, and when account could not

be made, or where the path of the animal had turned a hairsbreadth to the side, the man was punished and the dog went to its death.

At first no word of this came either to the pope or me. His dog, Joassaf Petrovitch had kept hidden in an inner room, and those in search forgot he was the owner of the beast. The whole pursuit would have passed us without once calling on the scent if it had not chanced that on a Wednesday, when it was raining hard, as we were out and coming back across the town, we came upon a man set in the stocks, who took his punishment in most unhappy wise.

The little roof above his head, which should have made a shelter for him from the rain, had gone askew by the help of some one's hand, and the drip of it, just missing his face as he leaned back, poured down in a steady stream upon his stomach and his legs. He was a slender fellow, and sickly at the best, and as he sat there wet and draggled in his forced inactivity, his face was blue and pinched and he shivered in the keen sea air as if in his desire to be free he would shake out his very life.

He was so dismal in his sodden misery, that involuntarily I stopped to look at him. It was the physician's instinct rather than an impulse of the heart that made me search in my pocket for a flask. The fellow watched me eagerly as I drew out the cork and he held up his mouth like a fledgeling bird for me to pour the liquor in.

He gasped a little as it burned its way, but, when it was down, he settled back with a great sigh of comfort and relief and looked the thanks he had not power to speak. The pope pulled up his roof till it stood

square again on its supports, and the water once more drained away from him beyond his feet.

"What have you done, man?" I said in sympathetic question. "Your lapse must have been great that it required setting out in a rain like this to soften your heart." He made a grateful attempt to smile in answer, but the result was too watery for a full success.

"It was my love for animals," he said when he could hold himself so he could speak. "They tried to take my dog to kill him and I struck the officer, and so they set me here. They got the dog," he added gloomily.

"But what had the beast done that they should take him?" I asked in some surprise.

"They said that he had killed the calf. It was the general order. I could not prove he had not, so they took him like the rest." I turned quickly to the pope and found him looking at the man with an agitation he could not conceal.

"You say you are here because they thought your dog had killed the calf?" he demanded hurriedly.

"Yes," assented the man. "There was no other fault."

"It is a mistake," said Joassaf Petrovitch, eagerly. "I did not know there was a search. I will go to Alexander Andreievitch at once." The prisoner did not understand the reason for his agitation but he gathered clearly that we were about to intercede with Baranof in his behalf. He mustered courage to ask for further drink and I poured the brandy into him in a long, gurgling stream. Thus fortified, he watched our going with growing interest and peace, and sent after us an avalanche of fervent prayers for our success.

Baranof, as was usual with him at the hour, was busy

at his desk, but the rain or lack of business for the day had worked successfully to clear the place, and, the audience room being empty, we were not obliged to wait. The pope did not stop for recognition, but began to speak at once.

"Alexander Andreievitch," he began excitedly, "I have done a wrong and I have come to you to set the matter right." Baranof laid down his pen and looked up at him with a smile. In the intimate association of the days just passed he had come to understand the old man and to look with more indulgence on his impulses and whims. He did not speak at once, but, stretching his fingers like one who has just discovered it is cold, got up and walked as if for exercise, around the desk.

"I am glad to find that you recognise that there is authority in me," he said good-humouredly. "Sometimes I think you priests believe there is no power above you except God." Joassaf Petrovitch was too much troubled to take notice, even, of the lightness of the speech.

"There is a man out yonder in the rain," he said earnestly. "His punishment is wrong, and I come to you to have you let him go and put me in his place." Baranof did not even question this astonishing demand, putting it down to some delusion of the priest. He thought gravely for a moment and then said:

"If we were in China now, I have no doubt the substitution would be an eminently proper thing. But here, the man who does the crime must take the punishment."

"That is it," cried the pope hastily. "It was my crime, not his!" Baranof looked at him searchingly from under his heavy brows.

"What was the crime?" he asked quietly.

"The killing of the calf. It was my dog, not his, that did it." Baranof plainly looked relieved.

"Oh! That!" he said with some contempt. "I thought it must be murder at the least."

"But the man in the stocks," went on the pope aggrievedly.

"We will have him out," said Baranof, and turned and rang his bell. The order was soon given, and the commander turned again to us.

"Why did you not tell me before it was your dog?" he said reprovingly.

"The thing happened on the day Alexei Yegorovitch was killed and the weightier matters drove it from my mind. We did not know there was an inquiry until to-day." Baranof's eyes twinkled and he held his lips together to avoid a grin.

"I am not so sorry as I might be," he said slowly. "The delay has served to wipe out almost every worthless cur about the post. I have not had such a clearance in two years."

"But the punishment for me?" suggested the pope meekly. "I was more guilty even than the rest." Baranof nodded vigorously his understanding of the case and then laughed aloud.

"You are the first culprit that ever came to me to ask for his own punishment," he answered, "and that alone entitles you to mercy at my hands. Kill the dog and we will let it go at that." The pope's hands came convulsively together and he fairly gasped.

"I would like to keep him," he said tremulously. "If I should take the punishment, could it be arranged

that way?" Baranof's face grew grave and he meditatively pursed up his lips.

"Are you so fond of him as that?" he asked. "I remember now, you brought him from the North." He considered the matter in silence, while the pope waited breathlessly what he would decide.

"I do not see how it can be done," he said at last. "Once a killer, a dog is always one, and at the best it would be only a little time till you would have to give him up." The tears stood in the pope's eyes, but it was not his way to stand against authority and he accepted the decision without the protest of a word.

"When will they come for him?" he asked faintly.

"Oh, this afternoon, I suppose," said Baranof. "I am sorry for you, man," he added sympathetically. "I would allow it if I could. Let the beast go and if you like you shall have any other decent animal about the post."

The pope shook his head, but would not trust himself to speak, and we went out again, leaving Baranof with sufficient interest in the affair to keep him gazing ruefully after us till we reached the door, before returning to his work. Joassaf Petrovitch kept a pace ahead of me upon the road and, when we reached the house, closeted himself at once in the room where the dog was hid. He would not come out to eat and I made no effort to disturb him till the men came to take away the beast. Then I went to the door and called to him inside.

"Joassaf," I said, "the men are here." There was no answer and I tried the door. It was fastened on the inside and I had no recourse but to call again.

"Joassaf," I repeated, "you must bring out the dog."

"I hear," came out the stifled answer. "In a moment I will come." I stopped my knocking and went back to the men, who had remained outside. It was full five minutes before he ventured out; but at last he came, with the dog hugged tightly to his breast and on his face the look of renunciation Abraham must have had when for sacrifice he first laid hands upon his child.

The time of waiting had evidently been given to the last farewells, for, without a change of feature or a word, the pope went to the nearest man and put the creature in his arms. The dog, with his eye obediently on his master, made no struggle and remained quietly in the fellow's grasp.

The men moved off and the pope turned aside and stood with his head bent and fingers on his lips to wait till they were wholly out of sight. But the dog, released from the binding magic of the pope's control, registered a strong disclaimer to the manner of his carrying off and promptly bit his captor on the arm. The man dropped him, and the animal, once upon his feet, took to his heels and fled swiftly toward the house.

But it was not to accomplish its escape, for the other man, raising his gun, took hurried aim and fired, and the dog, struck in a vital part, stumbled and went down almost at Joassaf Petrovitch's feet. He was upon it almost as it fell and with hysteric abandon petted it and talked to it as if it still could understand. I motioned to the men to go away, and, after a moment, the pope gathered up the dead body in his arms and without a thought for me or the blood that smeared his clothes, carried it inside and out of sight into his own room.

Some time between that and the next night he gave it burial in the yard behind the house, but he chose a time for doing it when he was all alone. Either his grief was too sacred to admit of being shared, or the bitterness within him prompted him to hold the memory entirely to himself, for with this last expression of his love he brought the matter to an end. From that time there was no mention of it between us, either by act or word. I did not question him and he vouchsafed to me no exposition of his thought.

But the sting of his grievance stayed with him and rankled in his heart. He grew visibly older and more stooped and was infirm in his temper at unexpected times. So strongly did this spirit grow upon him that in the end I found it hard to meet him with the old frankness in our daily life and, as a result, the lack and its accompanying need to round out elsewhere my uneven store of peace, did much to take me away from him and his affairs and turn me to the thought of Anna Gregorovna and what I might expect of future happiness at her hands.

Not that she was not already in my mind. There was no minute passed that did not find her as an undercurrent in my thought. But I had wisely settled with myself that it was best to withhold advances till the shock of Alexei Yegorovitch's death had worn away, and so I had been little in her company.

From the date of my home coming to the time the accident occurred I had had no speech with her at all. The lieutenant's unhappy end wiped out for the moment the record of his lapse, and she stood as mourner for him at the burial with all the proper form. But afterwards I had held the hope that

when I met her she would give to me some word in recognition of my claim. On the contrary, when the meeting came, it went again and left no sign for me beyond the smart that told that I at least had felt. She let me come to her and was cheerful and demure, and for a moment's space I held her hand. But at no time in her manner was there the old heartiness and warmth, and she let me go away with the bitter feeling in my heart that she held me wholly outside her reserve. So disturbed was I by these things which had occurred that I could not keep the matter to myself and went to Peter Nicolaievitch for advice.

"Let her alone," he said, "and she will be all right. She knows she can have you any time she wants, and she does not know you heard the quarrel with Alexei Yegorovitch on that last night. What she is doing is saving her reputation for constancy at the expense of her love, and when she has allowed a proper margin for propriety, I'll stake my head that she will let you know. But in the meantime, take her strictly at her word."

The advice was good, and though at times it strained me almost to the breaking point, I have followed it religiously until this time. I have met her frankly and without constraint and have been properly assiduous in her care, but never by word or look have I come across the line of ordinary fellowship, and have made no sign that I was holding her as needful in my life.

It has been a long wait I have had for the word to come from her and I have spent much time in speculation as to in what way I might reasonably look for it to come. At first there was that in her observation of my conduct which was very near surprise, but I think she was grateful that I saw and stood aside. Later the

surprise gave way to a look of puzzled inquiry and I think she wondered that I thus remained aloof.

With my mind once set upon this plan I would not speak until I felt she gave to me some glimpse of her own heart; and so I have stood stoutly out and let her see no spark of all the fire that has been consuming me within. Yet more than once I have been perilously near to speech, and it was finally because within the week she has drooped with some little sickness that I forswore myself and made an end of my resolve. Seeing her pale disturbed me, so that my heart smote me that I had thrown on her the burden of the choice, and I suddenly determined to wait no longer, but do my speaking and throw myself at once upon the fortune of the chance.

It was this morning, therefore, with intention, that I stood outside the stockade and waited till she came out for her daily morning walk. She did not see me and I did not speak, but lagging behind, I followed her as she went out across the village and took the path that led to the great hill behind the post. It was a favourite walk of hers and I knew where I should find her at the end, so I curbed my haste and contented myself with the occasional glimpse of her that came to me as she passed some sunny spot between the trees.

When I did come upon her, she was standing at the lookout station at the top and gazing westward out across the sea. The fog was low and lay like a fleecy blanket as far as the eye could reach; and beyond the mouth of the inlet, where the hills on the northern point stood out like green islands above the sea of mist, I saw, distinct and clear, the three masts of a ship.

It was this she was watching and so intent was she upon the view, that she did not hear me until I was

fairly at her side. Then she caught the sound of my footsteps and looked hastily around and as she faced me I saw that her eyes were full of tears. She put out her hand to me without surprise and almost as if she had expected me to come.

"See the ship, Fedor Kirilovitch," she said with her emotion trembling in her voice. "It is the *Ekaterina* that brought us here six months ago. They told me below that I could see it from this point. It is the first time since our bringing that she has come back." I took the hand she offered and held it as we stood to look. It seemed so natural a thing to stand there with her that it did not come to me to be even astonished or afraid.

"Is the ship, then, so bitter a memory that the thought of it still brings the tears?" I said, keeping my eyes from her and looking out across the sea. She shook her head sharply as if to rid herself of the troubles that lay behind her gaze and turned her face wistfully up to mine.

"It is a bit of homesickness, I suppose," she said tremulously. "I was thinking of the things I had then that have vanished for me now, and such memories are always sorry things."

"You have lost much," I assented and took tighter hold upon her hand.

"But it is not all bad," she added earnestly. "This at least has come to me out of my trouble, that I shall always have you as a friend."

"And only as a friend?" I asked, my courage rising with her kindly words. She did not immediately answer but looked again steadily out across the sea. When she did turn back to me, her eyes were once more brimming with her tears.

"Why should you want me, Fedor," she said humbly, "knowing what I have been to Alexei Yegorovitch and having between us the shadow of his love?"

"Alexei Yegorovitch is dead," I answered stoutly, "and there is no dishonour in standing in his shoes. I do want you with my whole heart and if I find no bar in what has passed, it seems to me the matter should not count with you. When it all happened you were very young, and, besides, from the time we were on the ship, I do not believe you have loved anyone but me."

"Perhaps," she answered softly. "I know for a long time my conscience never gave me any peace." I drew her round so she faced me and took her other hand.

"Anna," I said, "do you remember that of your own free will you gave to me the promise that whatever came to you in life, I should always have a place upon your hearth?" She listened passively with her eyes bent down.

"Yes," she said.

"And would you break that promise now, simply because the providing of the hearth must fall to me? There is no other way the promise can be kept." She hesitated just a moment in some last struggle with herself, but when she looked up at me there was a full surrender in her eyes.

"You know I would not, Fedor," she said, lifting up her face, and in another moment I had her in my arms.

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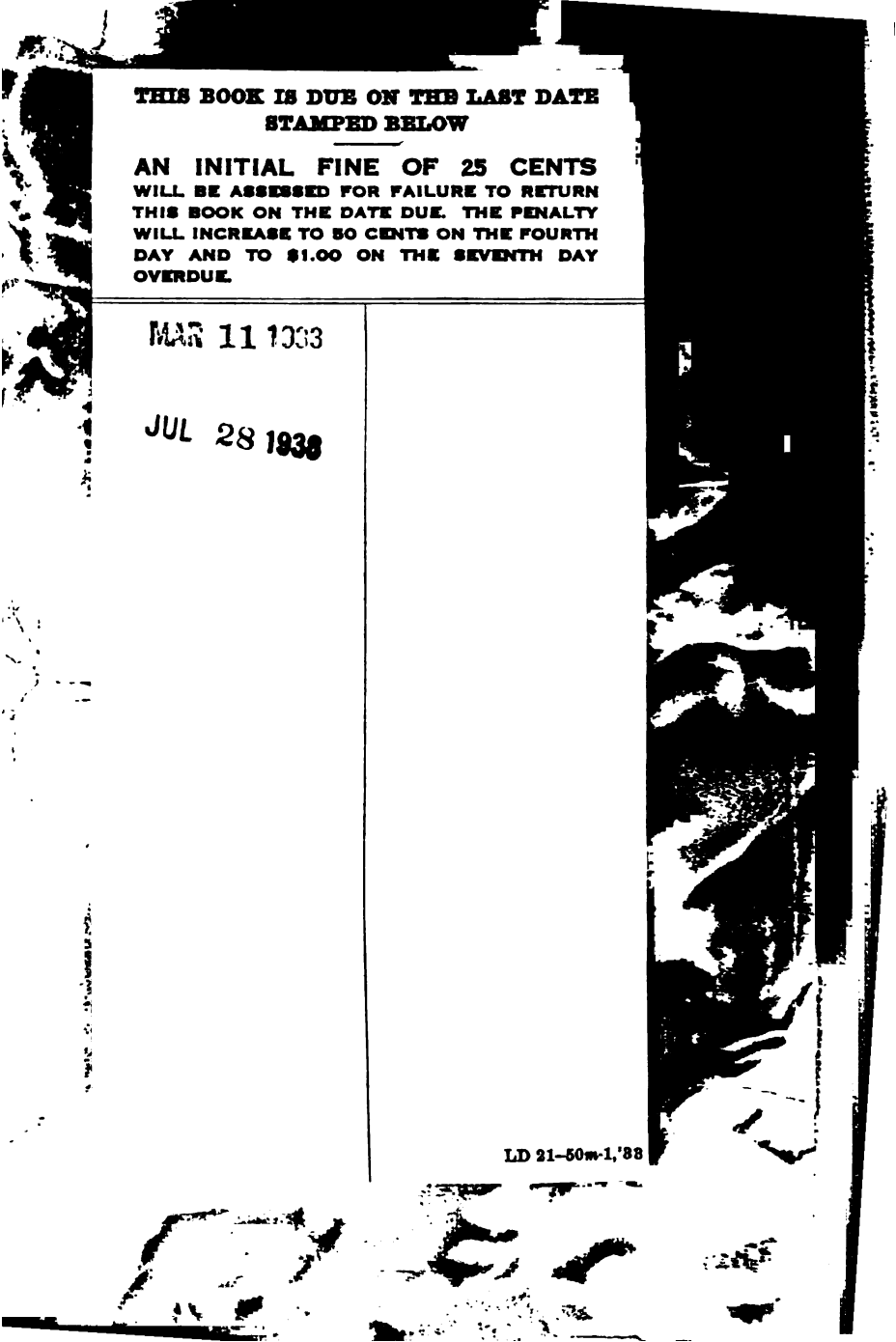

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